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Everybody's



NUMBER THREE

MARCH, 1924

VOLUME FIFTY

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

CONTENTS

A COMPLETE NOVEL

- 'Nastasia ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE 37
Illustrations by STOCKTON MULFORD

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

- Punctilious Parbold MICHAEL ARLEN 25
Illustration by GERALD LEAKE
- The Golden Bum RICHARD CONNELL 31
- The Pearls of St. Matthew's ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN 63
- Mr. Collin's Adventures FRANK HELLER 72
I. The Story of the Absent-Minded Gentleman
- Candle Lighter NORMA PATTERSON 85
Illustration by W. G. RATTERMAN
- Atlas THOMSON BURTIS 121
- The Fourth Big Brother SAM CARSON 134
Illustration by COURTNEY ALLEN

THREE SERIALS

- The Devonshers HONORÉ WILLSIE MORROW 0
Illustrations by ERNEST FUHR
- The Wrath to Come E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM 93
Illustrations by HARLEY E. STIVERS
- The Double House ELIZABETH DEJEANS 147
Illustration by ERNEST FUHR

OTHER FEATURES—Poems: The Farthest Ports, by Edmund Leamy, 133; Of Blue and Lazy Water, by Mary Carolyn Davies, 146. Departments: Everybody's Chimney Corner, 178; Prose and Worse, by Gridley Adams, 181; Everybody's Chestnut Tree, 183. Cover Design by Charles A. MacLellan.

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Everybody's

VOL. 50, No. 3

MARCH, 1924

SEWELL HAGGARD, EDITOR

The Fight of a Girl to Come Clean

*Beginning
A Powerful Novel
By the Author of
"Godless Valley"
And "The Lariat"*

Illustrations by Ernest Fuhr



The Devonshers

By Honoré Willsie Morrow

COYOTES barked hungrily, then paused. A dog's long-drawn howl, deep-throated, menacing but forlorn, warned them not to narrow their shifting circle. Then a silence, cut finally by the short, piercingly sweet note of a bluebird. The starlit sky above Gray Bull Mountain turned from midnight-blue to green, from green to orange. The huge oval bulk of Sioux Hog Back shimmered, iridescent, to the north.

The dog bayed again, his great bass voice hurtling back at him in a hundred echoes from which emerged the staccato threat of the coyote pack. Gradually, the upland pasture between the west flank of Gray Bull and the south wall of Sioux Hog Back gleamed rose-green in the dawn. Clumps of sagebrush emerged from black rock heaps.

Dwarf cedars flung distorted arms toward the translucent yellow heavens. And the buck fence encircling the old branding corral pricked forth from the blue wall of the spruce thicket to the west.

The edge of the sun rolled above old Gray Bull, and red light marched from the top of the gigantic peak to its flanks, to its base, across the upland pasture to the tortured cedars, to the cactus-armored rock heaps, to the buck fence, across the adobe-floored corral to its eastern half, to the dog, huge, tawny-striped, sitting on his haunches beside—beside that for which all night the coyotes had hungrily circled the buck fence:

The body of a man in blue denim, his face a bloody pulp, his arms and legs flung wide in agony like the branches of the wind-tortured cedars.

As the sun shot clear of Gray Bull, the tawny dog stopped in the midst of his mightiest howl to listen, ears raised and forward. After a moment, he stood up, tail wagging, and when there appeared at the open gate of the corral a stout woman in a pink gingham dress he leaped to meet her.

The woman, panting, ran toward the silent figure on the east side of the corral.

"Angus!"—shrilly and more shrilly. "Angus! Angus! Angus!" Then a long-drawn scream that echoed between the two mountains again and yet again before it was broken into a thousand lesser echoes by incoherent groans and phrases.

She ran from the body to the fence and beat upon the topmost bar with clenched fists, her face, twisted and working, turned up to the exquisite June sky. She locked her hands together above her braids of brown hair and screamed until, at last, the tears came and she leaned against the topmost bar, her heavy body racked by sobs.

The dog whined, running from the woman to his master's body, back and forth, back and forth until he had made a padded trail between the two.

The sun was an hour high before the woman ceased her weeping and drew away from the fence. Still with her back to the figure in blue denim, she took off her black-sateen petticoat and holding it before her face, at arm's length, she stumbled across the dog's restless trail and dropped the skirt over Angus's unspeakable face. This done, she weighted the edges down with stones, then spoke to the dog.

"You stay here, Rex, till I get back."

The dog looked up into her tear-bleared face, whining pitifully.

"You've got to stay, Rex! Go sit down by him, like a good dog."

The dog sank back obediently to his haunches. The woman, who, in spite of her stoutness, was under thirty, started on a run out of the gate.

There was an old trail leading from the branding corral down into the aspen grove which glimmered like a delicate lavender shadow four miles southward at the west foot of Gray Bull. Down this trail the woman lunged, her pink skirts whipping out behind her. She sobbed no more but she panted heavily, resting when she could go no further without falling.

Where the dropping trail reached the level alfalfa fields before the aspen grove, a brook rushed swiftly. The woman disregarded the stepping-stones, wallowed over the stony, sandy bed, scrambled up the steep bank, crossed the greening fields and staggered into the aspen grove—myriad straight trunks leading in delicately shadowed aisles toward the steep west flank of Gray Bull. The trail turned to the left. A log house was set in a little clearing. The brook had twisted itself about to run past the back door. The front door stood wide open and the woman lurched over the step into a living-room, the one room of the house. A telephone hung on the wall beside a window. The woman, her hands shaking almost uncontrollably, seized the receiver, and demanded a number.

After a moment she spoke. "Father! It's Minnie. . . . Angus has been shot. Come right away. . . . No, he's dead. . . . I don't know. . . . This morning. Just now. Up in the old branding corral. . . . He's——" Her voice ended in a hysterical jumble. She slammed up the instrument, and shrieking, she staggered across the room to throw herself on the bed.

AN HOUR and a half later a dusty five-passenger automobile bounced across the upland pasture toward the old branding corral. Two men clambered out as the car halted in the middle of the enclosure. Sid Brownell, the driver, was Minnie's father, very fat, in denim trousers, booted and spurred, a khaki shirt, no belt, no tie, a broad-brimmed Stetson hat. The man with him was Henry Worth. He was about Minnie's age, tanned, gray of eye and brown of hair, with a smooth-shaven face of which high cheek-bones were the marked characteristic. He was dressed like Sid except that a wide rider's belt studded with blue-enameled buttons encircled his fine, slim waist and a brilliant blue neckerchief concealed his collar.

Rex, whining with relief, ran to meet them. In silence, the two men strode up to the body and Sid raised the cloth. Henry gave a single glance, then looked away to the spruce-clad top of Hog Back. Sid with a groan dropped to his knees and gave the body a thorough examination. When he rose, he was wiping a bullet, which he held out to Henry.

"Somebody had a .44 to work with," he said.

Henry took the bullet and studied it. "Must have been awful close to Angus to do that to him. Place is all cut up with hoof marks."

Sid, who also was sheriff of Antelope Basin, nodded. "No use trying to do anything yet. We'll get him down to the house and by that time Minnie's mother should have got her calmed down enough so's we can get the story. It'll be a couple of hours more before the judge gets here with the horses. Get the blankets, Henry. We'll roll him up good before we try to move him."

When the car turned slowly down grade, the tonneau was occupied by a brown, mummy-rolled figure which in spite of the ropes that tied it in and Sid's attempt at careful driving, rolled and bounced hideously behind the two firm figures on the front seat.

Once more down the trail shimmering in the beauty of the June mid-morning, pounded out by horses' hoofs. The car followed at imminent peril of turning over and slipping down the steep foot of Gray Bull. In the brook, known as Devonsher's Fork, the car stalled, and Henry had to work at the rear wheels with a crowbar before it lunged wildly up the bank.

Sid ran the machine round to the back of the house and, leaving the body in charge of Henry, he heaved himself up the step and into the living-room. Minnie was sitting quietly on the edge of the bed. Her mother, a small faded woman in the kimono and apron which she had been wearing when Sid had rushed her from breakfast, was frying some steaks at the kitchen stove.

Sid kissed his daughter and sat down in a chair by the bed.

"Minnie, I want you to tell me what happened."

"Did you bring him down?" asked Minnie, lifting eyes that much weeping could not make less blue.

"Yes! He's outside. We'll wait till Doc Peabody gets here. Meantime, try to tell me what happened."

"Angus went up to the old branding corral last night to take the horses up. He'd finished plowing and he'd worked 'em awful hard and he first said he wanted to give them a day of rest. Then he said he was going to use them to bait the horse

runner. We had a long argument. He even took the Princess horse and I told him he was crazy. He was so obstinate, it made me mad. I went to bed and never woke up till dawn and saw he hadn't come home. So the last word he ever had from me was a cross one!" Minnie ended with a gasping sob, and lay down on the bed.

Her mother, dishing the breakfast with calloused, work-twisted hands, shook her head, pathetically. "He don't hold it against you now, Minnie. Draw up and eat. Want Henry should come in, Sid?"

"Not yet," replied the sheriff. "I—I got a kind of feeling against Henry this morning. He acted as indifferent as if we'd found a bull, down. After all, he's quarter Injun, you know."

"Pshaw!" protested Mrs. Brownell. "Pretty late to bring that up, seeing we knew his grandfather before him."

"All the same," insisted Sid, "I'm not going to eat with him this morning." He drew up to the table. "Will you eat something, Minnie, ma?"

Both women shook their heads. The sheriff chewed thoughtfully for a moment, then said with an apologetic note in his voice:

"Minnie, have you any suspicions of what happened?"

Minnie rolled her head back and forth as if in physical effort to cast off her grief and concentrate on her father's question. "I think some one wanted the horses and ran 'em off and Angus got shot in the mix-up."

"**N**OBODY'S going to ride up to a man, Minnie, and hold him up for horses like he would for his purse," protested her father.

"I never said they would. But they could have tried to run the horses, thinking Angus was gone, and he might have seen them. That was what Angus said he wanted the runner to do. I told him he'd get hurt."

The sheriff shook his head. "Doesn't seem a good bet to me, Minnie. Was Angus in trouble with any one?"

"I didn't know he had a real enemy but Eve Devonsher, and she's in France."

"Eve Devonsher!" exclaimed Mrs. Brownell. "Oh, well, she was mad at the whole town."

"And at Angus in particular," insisted Minnie. "I never told you how she came up here before she left and gave Angus and

me a fearful calling down for that horse deal we had with the Englishman. Angus lost his temper something awful, and so did she. I always did hate her."

"So did I!" chimed in Mrs. Brownell, sudden vindictiveness in her gray eyes. "She's always held herself too highy-tighty, considering her father was shot for running cattle."

"Never you mind that!" exclaimed Sid, setting down his coffee cup. "Devonsher blood is the best in the country and Eve would no more harm Angus than I would."

"She'd kill anybody if she happened to have a gun in her hand when she was mad. Remember that time in school?" Minnie's head began to roll again. "Angus! Angus!" she sobbed.

"Never mind! Eve's in France, anyhow!" said Sid, his voice quivering in sympathy for Minnie's grief.

"Yes! Yes! I'm half crazy! Don't mind me, dad!"

The sheriff groaned and finished his breakfast without further speech.

It was two hours later that a man trotted through the aspen grove, leading a string of saddle horses. He was a man over fifty, with a light fringe of gray whiskers around his chin. He was blind in his left eye, but this did not detract from a certain debonair manner with which he wore his broad-brimmed hat, nor affect the agility with which he jumped from his horse, before the doorstep. Standing, he proved to be well over six feet, thin to emaciation. He nodded to Sid, who filled the doorway with his great bulk.

"Pretty awful, huh, Sid? What have you done with him?"

"Got him in the car, behind the house. Doc Peabody coming, judge?"

"He's right back of me!"

And as the judge spoke, a team of mules drawing a buckboard dashed out of the grove.

The doctor, small, gray-bearded, in a worn corduroy suit, tied the mules to the corral fence, then joined the other two at the step. His voice proved to be as gentle as his face.

"Minnie must be used up, poor girl. Perhaps I'd better see her before I go to Angus!"

Sid nodded and made way for the little doctor to enter the house.

"Let's go lay him out, where Doc can

get a good look at him," suggested the judge. "If you're going to make any headway running down the murderer, we ought to be on our way."

The doctor got a good look at Angus, lying stiffly on a blanket beside the car. "Killed instantly," he said, in his gentle voice.

"Medicine is a wonderful science!" snorted the judge. "Come on, Doc! Help us get him into your buckboard."

Shortly, the long brown roll was tied securely to the floor of the wagon, and with the two women crowded on the seat on either side of him, Doc Peabody started the mules back on the long drive to Antelope Basin. Sheriff Brownell, Judge Jones and Henry Worth pushed their horses back up to the old branding corral. Rex sat alone on the doorstep and howled.

It was sunset when the funeral party drove across the plaza of Antelope Basin toward Henry Worth's saloon, which was also the coroner's office.

It had struck the Englishman of whom Minnie had spoken that morning, as a curious thing that a quarter-blood Indian should be the coroner of a Wyoming town. Perhaps it was curious, but curious in its fitness rather than its unfitness. Henry was a consistent product of Wyoming. So was Angus, and so, Eve Devonsher and all the folk who had entered into the finding of Angus's poor and suddenly hideous body.

The people bred in the Rockies are like the ancient Greeks in one way. In order to understand them, one must understand the extraordinary land that begot them. And in judging their actions one must never forget for a moment the never-ceasing influence of Wyoming itself on their concepts and motives.

WYOMING! A vast and lofty plain nearly a hundred thousand square miles in extent. Two ranges of the Rocky Mountains sweeping above and across this plain; a chaos of peaks, of forests, of rivers, of cañons, of glaciers, of lakes, of dead volcanoes and living waterfalls.

Think of the plains lying between the north and south ranges of the Rockies as the smoothest of the state. Yet even these are interrupted by mountain groups, by volcanic buttes and lava flows. But, because they are the smoothest of the plains,

picture the railroad as approximating the line of the old Oregon Trail across them.

Now, twisting south from the railroad, picture a wagon trail lifting into the south range of the Rockies, fifty miles to the Antelope Basin country. It rises steadily from the orange plains, across mesas of purple lava, through blue-green foothills, until it sights the four peaks that hold the Basin. Then it keeps a steady elevation of about seven thousand feet to the shoulder of Old Battle Mountain, marking the north edge of the Basin. A few hundred feet below this shoulder lies a circular valley about a mile in diameter, guarded at the remaining three points of the compass by three other shadowed peaks, Sioux Hog Back, Antelope and Gray Bull.

A land of enormous distances that for the most part must be traversed slowly, intimately, by trail. A land of enormous loneliness, of beauty that sinks into the very depths of subconsciousness. The loneliness counts heavily.

In such a land dwelt Eve Devonsher and the folk who loved or hated her.

The little town of Antelope Basin into which Angus Duncan's body was being carried was the trading center for the ranches pocketed in all the vast hills about. The plaza once had been the home corral of Carter Devonsher, Eve's grandfather. Straggling about it, the little houses of the town had a beauty of their own. They were of logs, weathered to a clear silver tone and roofed with sod that blew green with grass this June day. The schoolhouse on the north side of the plaza was modern; concrete with a red roof. Devonsher's Hotel on the west side was of logs, painted red. Sid Brownell's Garage and Livery was of sheet iron, bright pink. Henry Worth's saloon next door was of logs, in gray. The courthouse and jail, of logs, of sod, of sheet iron, was multi-colored.

The sun, sinking behind Sioux Hog Back, had thrown the west side of the plaza into deep shadow. People appeared dimly at their doors when Doc Peabody pulled up before Henry's Place. There were several pairs of hands ready to lift Angus through the saloon into the dark room at the back; and still more hands to persuade the sobbing Minnie and her mother to leave the brown burden alone and return to their house, next to the Garage and Livery.

Considering the distinguished quality of the search party, which comprised, you will remember, the sheriff, the judge and the coroner, one would have expected results from the hunt for the murderer. The three searchers rode into Antelope Basin after twenty-four hours on the trail, silent, travel-stained, entirely noncommittal in manner. Henry Worth immediately held a coroner's inquest, in the saloon. The major portion of the population of Antelope Basin attended. At that, there was no overflow into the plaza. The Basin was only a tiny hamlet.

The proceedings were of an informality peculiar to the Basin country and to the independent, law-free folk who dwelt among the mighty hills. It was mid-afternoon when Henry poked his head out of the door of the saloon to see if any one else were coming. There was! A man was crossing the plaza in a Ford runabout. He pulled up before Henry's place and got out of the little car carefully.

"GOOD afternoon, Worth," he said. "I'm going to have another try at your horses. I can't forget that Devonsher Arabian strain."

Henry's glance was slow and serene. He stood for a moment in deliberate contemplation of the newcomer, who returned the saloon-keeper's stare in kind.

This was Peter Colbaith, the Englishman for whom Eve Devonsher had done battle. He appeared to be about thirty-five years of age, a big-framed man, who limped slightly as he got out of the car and whose hand showed a bad scar as he closed the difficult door of the automobile. He was blond, with high-bridged nose, deep-set blue eyes, close-clipped light hair and a sensitive mouth.

"Come in, Major Colbaith," said Henry, finally. "We're just going to hold the inquest over Angus Duncan."

"Over Angus Duncan! And what happened to Angus?" asked Peter, following Henry into the dim interior of the saloon.

"Well," the quarter-breed's low voice hushed the chatter of the Basin population, "if you sit down, you'll hear all about it. Or do you want to see the body first? It's in the back room!"

"No," replied Peter, "I don't care to see the body. I'll sit here, beside my friend Brownell, if I may?"

The room was filled with chairs and benches from the schoolhouse. Sid moved his huge body to make scant room on the bench he occupied before the bar. Henry moved to his accustomed place behind the bar. "We might as well begin," he said.

"You'd look more natural with your apron on, Henry," suggested Judge Jones, from his perch on a beer keg near the back door.

Henry did not reply.

"Sid," the judge directed, "you tell the folks just how you found the body and what Minnie said to you."

Sid began in his mellow voice and told his story clearly, every face in the dusky room turned toward him. Henry lighted the angle lamp above the bar, while the sheriff talked, and the interior of the saloon showed forth in the pale yellow glow. It was a simple room; with crude log walls, studded with horseshoes and moth-eaten pelts. The bar, however, was a recent importation, of ornate mahogany.

"Doc," said Henry, absently wiping the shining surface of the bar with a gray towel, "tell what killed Angus."

"A rifle shot through the mouth," came Doc Peabody's gentle voice in reply. "A .44 at close range. Death was instantaneous."

"Medicine is a wonderful science," chuckled the judge.

"Judge, you tell where we hunted, yesterday and to-day," directed Henry, imperturbably.

"Well, we scouted all over Sioux Hog Back almost on our hands and knees and we found nothing. No use going into fruitless details, that I can see. By the way, Henry, that old gun of yours behind the bar is a .44, isn't it?"

"Yes! Here it is!" Henry stooped to lift the rifle from its accustomed place. He rose with a blank expression. "It's gone!"

THE room was silent for a moment; then the judge asked, "You folks have an old .44, haven't you, Mary Devonsher?"

A thin-faced, gray-haired woman near the outer door nodded. "Yes, but Eve took it with her to France. It was her father's and she's fond of it."

"Heard from Eve since she left, Mary?" asked the judge.

Eve's mother shook her head and a deep

flush changed her tan skin to orange. "She said she wouldn't write."

The judge turned to Colbaith. "You made trouble for this valley, major, when you tried to buy horses."

"I know I didn't succeed in buying horses because you made the price prohibitive." Peter's voice matched Henry's in its casualness.

The judge went on, rubbing his fringe of whiskers reflectively. "When Eve Devonsher undertook to tell the men of the Basin country that they were traitors to the Allies, she went too far. It sounded as if she was more pro-British than pro-American. Didn't help her any to get mad, either. Eve has the Devonsher temper."

"It's the worst temper I ever heard of!" cried Minnie Duncan, unexpectedly. "Don't you all remember the time she took a shot at me when we were in the eighth grade? She was flag-bearer. It was right after her father——"

Mary Devonsher interrupted. "You said a horse thief's daughter had no business carrying the flag for Decoration Day. She grabbed the gun from Angus, who was color guard. She didn't get a chance to shoot. Angus was too quick. Don't start a lie about Eve, Minnie Duncan!"

"No, that ain't fair, Min," said Sid Brownell. "And it don't help poor Angus any. Does anybody know of any enemies Angus had?"

"Devonshers and Duncans hated each other from way back!" suggested Henry.

Mary Devonsher jumped to her feet. "How in the name of sense can you try to bring us Devonshers into this?" she cried.

"Sit down, Mary," said the judge. "You aren't a Devonsher any more than I am."

"My daughter's one and I'm not going to stand for this. That poor girl hasn't a friend to stand up for her. And I'll bet there's not a person in this room she hasn't done a favor for. Yes, you too, Minnie Duncan! She could have married Angus if she'd wanted to. And she wouldn't take him away from you."

"She thought she was too good for him!" Minnie's voice was deeply bitter.

"And she was!" Eve's mother went on. "That's right, all of you! Keep silent! She tried to keep you all from making hogs of yourselves when you saw how much the Englishman liked the Arab strain in your

horses. And who put that strain there but Dave Devonsher, her father? Well, I'm her friend and her mother beside and I tell you Eve's in France where some of your horse fanciers ought to be, this minute."

"I'm her friend too, Mrs. Devonsher," said Peter Colbaith, in his quiet drawl.

Judge Jones crossed his bony knees and turned his one eye on the Englishman.

"How come, major?" he demanded suddenly.

As far as the assemblage knew there was no reason why the Englishman should answer the judge's abrupt question. Peter never had answered any one's questions during his month's visit in the spring. That is, unless he had talked to Eve. However, to every one's surprise, Peter began to talk, and Antelope Basin listened eagerly. Even Minnie took her sodden handkerchief from her eyes.

Said Peter: "I'd be Miss Devonsher's friend if for no other reason than that she showed herself to be such a friend to the Allied cause. But I'm also her friend because she's such an altogether wonderful person."

"That's all right," grunted the judge. "But, as we say out here, stranger, before you 'light and look to your saddle,' tell us who you are."

Peter's lips twitched. "Your question is quite all right, of course. But before I answer it may I ask if we aren't delaying the coroner's verdict?"

"Might seem so," agreed Judge Jones, his one eye twinkling, "but Angus isn't in a hurry any more and the longest way round is often the shortest way home!"

"There is little to tell about me." Peter's gaze on the judge was curiously intent, while his voice drawled. "I was obliged to get out of the trenches for a bit. I was in Washington on business and as I know a little about horses, I came out here to buy some."

"Of course, we knew that much!" It was Sid Brownell who spoke. "Let's get on with the party, judge."

Judge Jones did not seem to hear Sid. "What are you when you aren't soldiering, major?" he urged Peter.

"Oh! Oh, yes! That! You see, judge, it's a bit difficult for us to remember that there ever was anything but soldiering. Before 1914 I was by way of being secretary to a member of Parliament."

"Hem! Sounds sort of harmless!" sniffed the judge.

"The Duncans and the Devonshers"—Henry Worth leaned over the bar and stared at Angus's body, in full view through the rear door—"always was enemies."

"Eve's in France, Henry," said the judge, abruptly.

"Who's heard from her?" demanded Henry, shaking out the bar towel. "Not even her own mother!"

"But why pick on Eve, Henry?" protested Sid Brownell. "Just like the major says, she's an awful fine girl, and she done a lot for Antelope Basin. Nobody minded her temper. That was just a Devonsher mark. She got the new schoolhouse here and she organized the Red Cross here. She put up a better fight than any of us to keep up the old standard of horse-breeding here. I'll admit she went crazy with regard to our sales to Major Colbaith. I don't like to see you slurring her that way, Henry."

"YOU talk as if that was all there was to it, dad!" cried Minnie. "I don't care if the Devonshers did own this valley once and if old Carter Devonsher was called a big man; both he and Dave did shady things and Dave was shot for a horse thief!"

Mrs. Devonsher again jumped to her feet. But the judge turned a kindly eye on her. "Sit down, Mary. It isn't as if you hadn't lived through worse than this. We'll let everybody get everything off their chests. Henry, why are you picking on Eve?"

Henry shook his head and his eyes, honestly puzzled, returned the judge's look squarely. "I don't know why, judge. I have the feeling. I can't get her out of my mind. And she took the .44 with her! And I'm as sure as I stand here that Eve was out of her head when she left the Basin. Don't you remember how she stood up at that Red Cross meeting she'd called us all to and said we were all traitors and no better than the Germans and worse than profiteers? And she fixed it so we couldn't sell horses to the British, didn't she, Major Colbaith?"

The major nodded. "Yes, she did us a good turn. I was angry at you, myself."

Judge Jones snorted violently. "Too bad about the way the British have to economize! Why didn't you ask for charity and be done with it, major? If you'd passed the hat, we'd have helped England out!"

Peter flushed but his voice did not lose its drawl. "Miss Devonsher's ability to see the war selflessly was one of the several things that made her so startlingly different from the rest of the Basin."

There was a silence in the saloon for a moment, during which all eyes turned toward Angus's rigid body. Then the judge said abruptly: "Henry, why would a sensible woman like Eve try to take a rifle with her to France? She'd know it couldn't be done!"

Henry nodded. "Just what I was wondering!"

"And," the judge went on, "what became of your .44, Henry? When did you see it last?"

Henry shook his head, thoughtfully. "I don't know that I've seen it since the new bar came in, last month. I hung it under here then and haven't seen it, as I recall, since."

Little Doc Peabody cleared his throat. "I don't want to lay suspicions on anybody, but, Henry, I guess you've forgotten that you were cleaning the .44 about a week ago, when I came in for a drink at midnight. It was the night the Inchpins baby came and I was tired, and I saw a light in here and took a chance on your being awake."

"That's right! I remember!" Henry nodded, frankly. "The coyotes got my Spanish rooster the night before. I hadn't any cartridges for my other guns and I thought I'd try the old .44. So it was fresh-loaded. All ready for any one who wanted to use it! I put it up and as you see, forgot it."

There was another silence during which all eyes were fastened not on Angus but on Henry, who continued to shake his head, thoughtfully.

It was the sheriff who broke the silence. "Then what I'm to go out after is the guy that took Henry's .44. That's a hunch, anyhow."

"Why not go after Henry himself?" cried Mrs. Devonsher. "He's been mighty free in his hints about Eve."

For the first time Henry smiled. The flash of his white teeth in his serious face was very pleasant. "Sure, go after me, Sid! I'll be right here, any time you want me. Well! I'm going to declare Angus dead by a bullet, from a .44 rifle in hands unknown. You'd better not delay the funeral, Minnie. It's getting awful hot weather."

"The funeral will be tomorrow morning," said Minnie's mother, "at eleven o'clock. Services in the church. Sid's going to sing at the grave."

Peter Colbaith walked in the twilight across the plaza to Devonsher's Hotel, after leaving his runabout in Sid's Garage. There were three or four ranchers, the stage driver and Judge Jones seated at the long dining table when he came in. Mrs. Devonsher was not to be seen. The supper was being served by the Chinaman who also was the cook. An animated conversation among the men ceased only for a moment when the Englishman entered. They paused long enough to greet him and to pass him the meat platter. Then they continued their discussion of the session in Henry's Place.

"LOOKS as if Henry might have a little explaining to do, himself," said one of the ranchers.

"Aw, Henry was as surprised as any one about the rifle," protested the stage driver.

"Henry's quarter Indian," said a second rancher.

"He doesn't look like an Indian," suggested Peter.

"His Indian blood couldn't be mistaken by any of us old-timers." The judge wore spectacles and was examining his dish of prunes suspiciously. "I wish Mary Devonsher would get a German hate on prunes," he said. "I knew Henry's father and remember his grandfather's reputation as a preacher."

"A preacher?" asked Peter.

"Yes, sir! Henry Worth's grandfather was old Elias Worth, a missionary to the Indians back in the forties. His headquarters was up at Fort Jason on what was then British territory. Carter Devonsher had charge of an English fur-trading fort up there. It was a big concern, self-sustaining, you know, with farms and saw-mills and such attached. Old Carter was big chief, with power of life and death over every one employed by him. There were a lot of Indians, some of them converts. One of the squaws, a Sioux, a mighty smart woman, acted as an interpreter there for a good many years. There were practically no white women in this part of the world, then. Lord! How hungry men used to get for the sight of one!"

The judge shook his head reminiscently,

then went on. "It was as ordinary as breathing then for men to take a squaw to live with. And finally old Elias slipped a cog and took this interpreter squaw into his tepee. They had a son, John. After his mother died, John followed Carter Devonsher down here. Old Carter never would speak to him. John married Mamie Sullivan, an old Irish trapper's daughter, and Henry is their child. Everybody likes Henry, though he has some real Indian traits. He's pleasant and obliging. That's Irish. But he is as revengeful as—as an Indian."

Peter Colbaith looked thoughtfully around the vast, log-walled apartment that once had been the main room in Carter Devonsher's ranch house. It was of noble proportions, beamed with huge, unsplit spruce trunks.

"I wonder how Carter Devonsher came to leave British territory for this?" he murmured.

"Something queer about it nobody ever did get the straight of," said the stage driver.

"He was mixed up in the international politics of those times." The judge took off his spectacles and with a resigned sigh attacked the dish of prunes.

The stage driver loosened his richly studded rider's belt and poured himself another cup of coffee. "We never did hear"—he looked at the judge—"why the Duncans always hated the Devonshers."

The old man fixed his eye on Peter, gulped down the last of the prunes and was about to speak when the telephone bell rang. Mrs. Devonsher came in from another room to answer it. She turned to one of the ranchers. "Your wife wants to speak to you, Dick."

Dick lumbered to the telephone. An excited colloquy took place. Dick banged up the receiver and turned to the group at the table. "Some one's run off with my standard-bred gelding. Better call up your places, ranchers, and see what's going on with you. Me, I'm not waiting for Angus's funeral. I'm getting home now."

The others telephoned to their places but so far only Dick Bowman's corral had been visited. "But I'm not going to wait for trouble," said the slat-like owner of the Bar-H. "I'm going to look for it. Judge, you'll have to say our prayers for us over old Angus. We're off."

IN LESS than ten minutes the judge, the major and Mrs. Devonsher were sitting alone, watching the Chinaman clear the table. No one spoke until Lee Fu had slammed the kitchen door behind him. Then the judge, his one eye twinkling, looked at Mrs. Devonsher.

"Mary, do you believe in ghosts? Sounds like the old days when Dave Devonsher was riding these hills."

Mary flushed. "It's not a thing to joke about, judge. Especially with a stranger here."

The judge unbuttoned his blue-denim jumper and stretched his long thin legs, all booted and spurred, toward the stove. June nights are cold in this mountain country. He smiled at Peter, showing tobacco-stained teeth.

"Why don't you say a foreigner, Mary? He's a bloody Britisher and we naturally despise all such." He gave Mary no opportunity to reply. "You know, major, Mary isn't a Basinite. She's still from Boston. She's still the schoolma'am Dave Devonsher married thirty years ago. I'll bet this minute she's thinking how her folks licked yours at Bunker Hill."

"I'm not anything of the kind, Willy Jones!" cried Mary Devonsher. "I'm thinking that you're the queerest, most disagreeable old man in Wyoming. Haven't I trouble enough without your rasping me in addition?"

"You have had trouble, Mary! More than your share," said the judge with unexpected gentleness. "Still, Eve makes up for a lot of things. Mary, did Eve seem all right when she left you?" He tapped his bald head significantly.

Mary hesitated, looking at Peter. There was something racial about Mary Devonsher, in spite of the work care and worry had done on her features; something fine in the chiseling of her nose, in the deep set of her eyes, in the modeling of her long chin. The Englishman leaned toward her, holding his short pipe in his scarred hand. He spoke very earnestly.

"Mrs. Devonsher, I am interested in your daughter. She's—she's—well, as was said this afternoon she's rather tremendous, don't you know. If you feel that all is not well with her, it would make me happy to try to help her. I have connections in France that might be useful."

"I don't hesitate about you, Major Colbaith," replied Mary, "any more than I do about the judge. He's a lawyer and I don't trust his questions."

"You can trust me about Eve," the judge said coolly. "If I had both my eyes and ten years less to carry, I'd have married Eve."

Nobody commented on this, but after a long contemplation of the judge's remaining eye Mary said slowly: "When Eve left here that night she was angry as I'd never seen her before. Not a raging anger but a white silent anger that didn't belong to a Devonsher. You see nobody, not even I, knows what Eve has suffered from the things Dave did. The children in school used to taunt her with him, until she tried to shoot Minnie Duncan—Brownell, she was then. You know how the women of the town wouldn't have anything to do with us for years, till you proved to 'em we weren't living off the money Dave got from running horses. You see, major, Eve had a fine heritage that somehow turned yellow. And it's tortured her."

"I wish," said the Englishman slowly, "that I understood all the allusions that have been made to-day."

The judge ignored Peter's suggestion. "What I'm interested in is what's happened to Eve."

"Yes, you're interested in Eve, Willy Jones," agreed Mary Devonsher; "but you're more interested in the law. And so I don't trust you. Eve felt as if the Devonshers owed a debt and she's gone to France to pay it. That's what she told me and I believe her."

She rose and deliberately turned out one of the two lamps that lighted the vast room. The judge grunted and with a short "Good night!" slammed out of the hotel. Peter went to his room across the hall.

The cemetery lay at the foot of Gray Bull Mountain, overlooking Antelope Basin, and in turn was overlooked by all the towering blue and orange peaks that caught the sailing clouds for miles about. It was treeless, wind-swept, grown up with cactus and sagebrush. But it was carefully fenced and was well dotted with monuments. Years before, a Sioux chief had weathered back to eternity on a tribal burial platform which stood near the present Devonsher lot. When Carter Devonsher's wife died, he had

ordered the grave dug near what was left of the platform. Jocelyn Devonsher would have preferred even the ghost of an Indian to being left alone to the coyotes. Thus the Antelope Basin burial ground had been located.

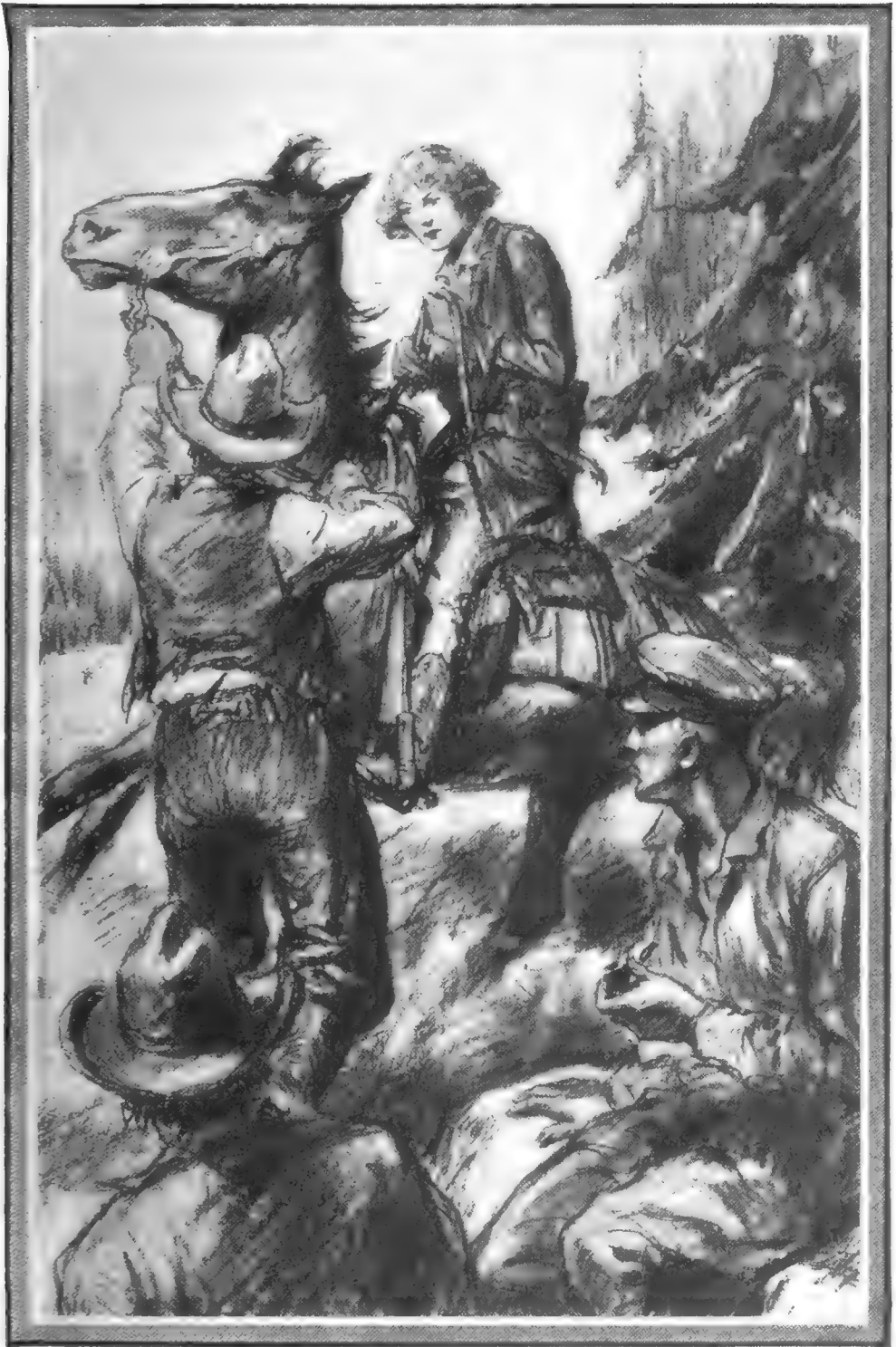
The services at Angus Duncan's grave were simple. The minister prayed. The crowd stood with bowed heads. The wind swept down from the hills with a thousand cool scents. Minnie in a choking voice said: "Dad! Sing!"

PETER COLBAITH had heard Sid Brownell sing many times during his previous stay in Antelope Basin. Sid's singing was one of the institutions of that part of Wyoming. The sheriff was possessed of a tenor voice of a peculiarly heart-searching quality. Peter had heard many voices—none that so moved him. And though Sid's repertoire was not small, on public occasions he was always called upon to sing the same song. It was on the surface a preposterous ditty called "The Oregon Trail." No one knew whence came the air. It was one of haunting melody. Perhaps Sid had evolved it himself. Certainly he and he alone had set the words to the music. And these words consisted of an endless repetition of the phrase "The Oregon Trail!" It was not a song, to Peter's mind, but a chant, a chant of extraordinary significance to these people of the plains. For he had seen it move them as he had seen great oratory move crowds. What memories it evoked in them, what dreams, he could not have put into words. Yet he felt that in some way he must have a vague kinship of the spirit to these Wyomingites. For he too had been thrilled by Sid's song. War-worn as he was, racially old, disillusioned, heart-sick over the world's failure, still Sid's chant of the pioneers had power to thrill him.

And so, at Minnie's request, the sheriff lifted his great chest, swallowed two or three times and opened his lips that a flood of silver melody might pour forth.

"The Oregon Trail! The Oregon Trail!
The Oregon Trail! The Oregon Trail!"

Bowed heads were lifted. Minnie ceased to twist her wet handkerchief and raised her blue eyes to the peaks. The little crowd about the grave swayed slightly to the enchanting solemn rhythm. A humming



"No one is going to use force, you know," drawled Peter. "You aren't bullying Tommies here, major," suggested the judge. "Oh, I know that! I'm only watching two men bully one woman."

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

accompaniment filled the air. Peter himself, eyes on the black crest of Battle Mountain, swayed and hummed with gaze that saw from Vimy Ridge to the Black Hole of Calcutta and thence round the world to that colony which Carter Devonsher had helped to build.

Henry Worth was standing beside the sheriff. His trim, hard body was tense. His gray eyes, deep-set above the high cheek-bones, burned with a curious brilliant light. He was not singing but his thin lips twitched. Suddenly, after the chant had continued until all had lost account of time, Henry's arms shot above his head.

"Stop it!" he roared. "Stop it! I can't stand it. I don't have to stand it!"

He glared menacingly at Sid Brownell, then turned and rushed toward his horse, mounted and galloped down the trail.

The minister broke the astounded silence by dropping a clod of clay and sand on the coffin. Minnie and her mother turned away and the other women-folk followed. Peter watched the filling of the grave, then joined the group of men who gathered around the horses.

Doc Peabody was issuing a solemn statement. "I'm not going to run around blacking up anybody's character. But Henry Worth's got something to do with Angus' shooting. I'm not saying he fired the shot. But Henry's not himself."

"Well, Doc," said a rancher, "you've got to remember that Henry always did get more excited over 'The Oregon Trail' than other tunes, though he howls over all of them."

The sheriff looked round at the dozen men who had not been drafted out of Antelope Basin.

"I want a couple of you to go with me on a bear hunt up back of Gray Bull," he said. "The ranchers can take care of the horse-running. Me, I'm going on a bear hunt."

"I'll go." Peter Colbaith spoke suddenly. "I'm supposed to be on a week's rest. Orders from the doctor in Cheyenne. I've hunted almost every animal but bear."

Sid looked at the Englishman doubtfully. Judge Jones settled the matter. "You take the major and me, Sid. We can be spared better than any other man flesh round here. We Basinites are just lousy profiteers but we did agree we'd get the plaza and the rest of the Basin under the plow. The season is awful late, and I'm no rancher."

Two hours later the sheriff, trailing a pack mule, himself mounted on a huge gray horse, led the way past the cemetery over the left shoulder of Gray Bull into the Forest Reserve. He was followed by the judge on a wiry bay mare and Peter on a blue roan. They, too, led pack horses. They made camp, at sunset, in a valley above the spruce line, a valley of black shadows and tiny misshapen cedars with a blood-red sky set like a lid overhead.

The judge cared for the horses. Peter made coffee. Sid cooked bacon and in the twilight they sat round the tiny fire to eat.

"**W**HERE are you going, Sid?" asked the judge.

"I'm going to look in Dave Devonsher's country for the horse thief that shot Angus Duncan. We're not ten miles from the old Mormon trail into Utah that Dave used. It's all grown up by now. Nobody's used it or seen it for twenty years. But it's the only way I know that could be used to run horses out of this country. It's a darned hard way to find, too. A landslide hid this end of it ten years ago."

"Are you the only one left that knows about it? Is that what makes you think it's being used now?" The judge rubbed his whisker fringe thoughtfully.

"Eve Devonsher knows about it. She got me to bring her up here when she was just a kid."

"I thought you were friendly to Eve," said the judge.

"I'm the sheriff of this county," returned Sid, briefly.

The judge grunted. "You couldn't touch a hair of a Devonsher head, Sid!"

There was silence round the fire, then Peter said: "But, sheriff, she's a woman and this is a man's work, running horses. And for all Miss Devonsher's spirit, she isn't an Amazon."

"That's what she'd be doing it on, spirit. She's got all of her father's and her grandfather's."

"But why should she do it?" insisted Peter.

"God knows! All the Devonshers go loco. I'd guess it was the row with the Basin and Howard Freeman's quitting her."

"Howard Freeman is principal of the school. Up at Laramie at the college for the summer," explained the judge. "A

Harvard man. One of the refined kind. He and Eve got engaged."

"I met him," Peter nodded. "He tried to sell me his horse. He didn't more than double the normal value. I might have taken it if Miss Devonsher hadn't interfered."

The judge and the sheriff grinned and the Englishman drawled on: "If I'd known you had Miss Devonsher in mind, I wouldn't have come. Have you any proof that she's not in France?"

"Not any," grunted Sid.

The meal was finished in silence.

At dawn they were on their trailless way again. They dropped into blue spruce forests, they threaded black and yellow cañons, they slid down mountains of crimson clay. At noon Sid paused before a wall of tumbled rock that blocked an aspen-grown cañon they had followed for an hour.

"YONDER'S the slide," he said. "Now the question is, can you get horses over it? Let's make medicine about it."

The judge and Peter dismounted with the alacrity bred by hunger. Nor did they permit the sheriff to begin the medicine pow-wow until a huge meal had been disposed of and the three lay at rest beside the little creek that gurgled from under the mountain-slide and rushed in green foam down among the aspens.

"Sid," exclaimed the judge, lighting a cigarette, "this is a mighty nice pleasure jaunt and I never saw a spot that I liked better than this for a camp. Outside of that, you are clean loco."

"Maybe I am. Anyhow, I got a hunch. I wish I wasn't so devilish fat. I'd work up to the top of the slide and see how far it extends up the cañon."

"I can do that," said Peter, "if you'll have patience with a rather putterish job."

"Isn't your leg still pretty tricky?" asked the judge.

"Not at all," drawled Peter, a sudden additional reserve in his manner. He rose and pulled off his coat, exposing the gaunt lines of his great shoulders and chest.

There were no reserves too deep for the judge. "You're carrying a lot less weight than normal, aren't you, major?" he inquired. "How'd that happen?"

Peter seemed not to hear. He tightened his belt and started toward the beetling

front of broken stone. At that moment, a horse neighed from a clump of cedars across the creek. The major paused and looked at his companions. They rose and, without a word, the three forded the creek, strode rapidly across the hundred yards of cactus-grown, broken ground between the stream and the little grove. The cedars formed a thick border around a space perhaps fifty feet in diameter—blue-green cones fencing a smooth floor of purple gravel. Two horses were tethered to an old spruce log in the middle of the circle. A woman stood with one foot on the log, hands in the pockets of her Norfolk coat, watching the three men as they entered her stronghold.

There were no immediate greetings. Peter drew a deep breath. It was Eve Devonsher. Riding breeches made her look very thin, very tall. She was bare-headed, with curly auburn hair cut short. Its color was glorious against the green cedar. Her face was thin and she was very much tanned. Her wide blue eyes were curiously full of light. Her lips were humorous, sensitive, sad.

The wind sighed through the cedars, ruffling Eve's hair in a thousand lights. "Rubies and topaz," thought Peter.

"Hello, Sid!" said Eve.

"Hello, Eve!" returned the judge and the sheriff in chorus.

"You too, major!" added Eve, her eyes dancing.

"Even I, Miss Devonsher!" agreed Peter.

"I hope you had a good dinner," continued Eve.

The judge looked at a quarter of venison hanging in the branches of a cedar. "Brought some antelope with you from France, I see."

"It's closed season for antelope." The sheriff spoke with a vacuous sort of eagerness. "That could get you into trouble, Eve."

"Yes," said Eve, simply, "it could."

"I say!" exclaimed Peter. "This is a jolly little camp! However did you find it?"

"I remembered it." Eve looked clearly into his eyes. "I saw it once when I was a child and ever since, whenever I've been in trouble, I've longed to come here and be alone. I've thought of it as a sort of fairy ring where trouble couldn't enter."

"You gave out you were going to France, Eve!" protested Sid.

"Yes," replied Eve, "I did."

"Well, darn it, Eve," cried the judge, rubbing his blind eye vigorously, "we don't want to butt into your camp. You come over to ours and talk."

"Have you had lunch?" asked Peter.

Eve shook her head.

"Come along. We'll feed you," urged Judge Jones.

One of her horses was saddled. Eve untethered him and swung into the saddle.

Sid looked at her uneasily. "You're sure coming over to our camp, Eve!"

Eve laughed. "Yes, Sid, I'm coming. Lead on!" She followed the three men closely. But when she reached their camp she made no move to dismount.

The judge looked up at her with a smile.

"'Light, stranger, and look to your saddle,'" he quoted the immemorial greeting of the plains.

Eve smiled in return. "'I don't know your camp, stranger.'"

SID kicked at the smoldering fire uneasily. Peter limped up to Eve's horse and put his scarred hand on the pommel of her saddle. The lines of suffering and disillusion around his eyes were startlingly clear in the sunlight.

"I assure you, Miss Devonsher," he said, "that you are entirely a free agent. You can dismount without a qualm."

"That's right, Eve. The Britisher won't let us run you," snorted the judge.

Eve appeared not to hear Judge Jones. She nodded to Peter and jumped from her saddle.

"I'm not going to eat, though, strangers," she said.

"I said, 'Look to your saddle,' didn't I," growled the judge.

"Yes, judge, but you see, you're not a real Wyomingite. You've only lived in Antelope Basin for forty years. It's not long enough to make us trust your grub, fully. Meaning no harm," added Eve with her ready laugh.

The judge grinned, showing his yellow teeth. "Well, sit down, anyhow. The major there keeps company manners and I know he'd rather be off that game leg."

Eve, the long reins looped round her elbow, perched on a tall boulder beside the creek. Peter found one beside her. The sheriff and the judge squatted before her,

their backs against the wall of the mountain-slide.

"Go ahead, judge," urged Sid.

"Yes, I was going to suggest that the judge conduct the investigation," agreed Eve. "Sid would be sure to tell me what it's all about and it may take me as much as a quarter of an hour to see where little old Willy Jones is heading."

"You aren't in any hurry, are you, Eve?" grinned the judge.

"Well, yes, I was, but it's quite all right. I can go another time," replied Eve politely.

"Just where was you going, if I might ask?" The old lawyer's one eye was dancing with enjoyment.

"To France. But there really is no hurry."

"Due southwest to France, eh? That's interesting."

"Isn't it!" The corners of Eve's lips deepened. "By the way, judge, question for question, where were you people going?"

"Us? Oh, we are on a bear hunt. Or so Sid says. That horse of yours looks tired, Eve."

"It is tired, Willy Jones."

"You don't treat my gray hairs with respect, Eve, I'm glad to observe. And speaking of hair, how come you to cut yours? It was your best beauty."

"Beauty rhymes with cootie," returned Eve. "Do come to the point, judge."

"Which point?"

"That's what I want to know. After all, I'm a free agent and I can see no reason why I should submit myself to this silly kind of thing. Why not go along on your bear hunt and leave me to my vacation?"

"Eve," asked the judge with a sudden change of voice, "did you know that about two weeks ago your mother sold your old Princess mare to Angus Duncan?"

Eve flushed. "I wouldn't have had Angus Duncan have that mare for a thousand dollars."

"Why not, Eve?"

"Because he's yellow, like his father and grandfather before him."

"Come now, Eve! Just because the Duncans was always a little stingy, is no reason for calling them yellow."

"Suit yourself, judge." Eve's eyes were no longer full of light. "But Angus Duncan shall not keep Princess, if I have to shoot her. I can't understand mother's selling

her to him. She knew how I felt. Unless——" Her face darkened more and more. The pupils of her eyes enlarged until it seemed to Peter that the iris had disappeared entirely.

"Unless what, Eve?" The judge rubbed his whiskers.

"That's something you'll never know, for all your unquenchable curiosity, judge. But quite confidentially, I say to you that I hate Angus Duncan with all the strength there is in me."

Sid cleared his throat.

"Keep out of it, Sid." The judge spoke sharply. "We all knew you didn't like him. You did have a row with him, though, about the prices he asked Major Colbaith for horses."

"Yes, I did," agreed Eve. "But I hated him before that. Sid knows it. Silly cat as Minnie is, I begged Sid not to let her marry Angus. No one should marry him. His line should die out."

"Whew!" breathed the judge. His one piercing eye traveled over Eve's deeply flushed face. She returned his stare, unafraid, angry, impatient.

"Hasn't this lasted long enough, judge? I don't like to think of anything by the name of Duncan."

"Maybe you'd not be interested in learning then, Eve, that we found Angus's body in the old branding corral on Sioux Hog Back, the morning after some one ran off his stallion and two mares."

All the deep color receded from Eve's face. She slid slowly from her perch on the rock and stood staring at the judge. The little creek rushed noisily into the aspens. Peter moistened his lips. His heart thudded heavily.

"Oh!" said Eve. "Oh!"

"I guess you'd better go back down to the Basin with us, Eve," suggested the sheriff.

Eve raised her eyebrows. "I've not the slightest intention of going back with you, Sid."

"I guess you'll have to, Eve. You know, Eve, I feel bad about this; I always did like you——"

Eve cut the sheriff's lumbering apology short. "Oh, be quiet, Sid! Major Colbaith, why did you let them bring you on an errand like this?"

"I thought you were in France," replied Peter.

"I wish I were." Eve spoke with a sudden, twisted smile. "I think I'd better be starting for there now." Quick as the thought she vaulted into the saddle.

With astonishing agility, the sheriff was on his feet, his hand on Eve's bridle.

"**W**AIT a minute, sheriff!" exclaimed Peter, without stirring from his seat. "On what grounds are you taking Miss Devonsher back to Antelope Basin?"

"She's got an antelope over there, hasn't she?" demanded the judge.

"Don't be idiotic, Willy Jones," cried Eve. "You gave me antelope steak not six months ago."

"You're coming with or without force, just the same." Sid's voice was dogged.

"No one is going to use force, you know," drawled Peter, mildly.

"You aren't bullying Tommies here, major," suggested the judge.

"Oh, I know that!" drawled Peter. "I'm only watching two men bully one woman. Miss Devonsher, would you allow me to have a short private conversation with you?"

"Oh, no, you don't!" exclaimed Sid.

"What's the idea?" asked the judge, suddenly.

"Come now, men!" Peter still did not move from his rock and his voice still dragged, but for some reason both the sheriff and the judge flushed. "Come now! You've jolly well bungled the whole affair. Go over by the horses where you can't hear what I say for five minutes, will you? You know that Miss Devonsher can't get away from you."

Eve watched her old neighbors curiously as they moved slowly to obey the major's thinly veiled command. But she did not speak. Peter rose and came to stand beside her horse's head.

"You know, Miss Devonsher, it's a nasty situation. If I were you I'd go back and clean it up."

"I'd rather shoot myself now," said Eve. "I'm sick of nasty situations. And the mere fact that I know I've been a fool won't help me endure this a whit easier."

"If I were you I'd go back, voluntarily," repeated the major.

"Why?" demanded Eve.

"Because"—he hesitated—"because the big ones always do. I mean, the very big

people always can take punishment. The bigger they are, the more they can stand. Like your Abraham Lincoln."

"Punishment! What makes you think I shall go back to that?" Eve's nostrils quivered.

"I mean that, to a person like you, merely having Judge Jones quiz you is punishment. And if you go back, there will be a great deal of that sort of thing. But I am sure you will decide to go."

Eve suddenly slid from her horse and took a rapid turn or two up and down beside the creek. When she paused, finally, in front of Peter, her face was pale beneath the tan, her pupils contracted with pain so that now the iris was unbroken blue.

"If you knew," she said, "what my life had been, you'd not ask me to do this. You'd loan me your gun while I blew my brains out. I've lost mine in the creek."

The major shook his head. "That's not the answer. If I believed it were, I could have met it that way in Flanders. I'm not as ignorant about you as you think. You went about with me a goodish bit for a month, trying to help me buy horses. I saw you worst your whole country in its effort to profiteer. And I've heard much talk about your family in the last few days."

"Don't you see," urged Eve, "that my family background is all against me, if I go back? Oh, I'm tired of the struggle, tired! I've been a fool. I'm to blame for this immediate situation. But I'm not to blame for the things that led up to it. No! No! I can't stand any more of it. I'll never go back."

"You will really go to France?"

"No! I'll shoot myself."

Eve spoke with tragic sincerity. Peter drew a deep breath.

"Why?" he asked gently.

"There are a thousand why's——" She stared at the wall of the mountain-slide, at the creek, at the judge and Sid, and at last straight into Peter's blue eyes. "Is this all there is of life? Struggle against forces too big for you?"

"I'm afraid," agreed Peter, slowly, "that that's all there is!"

"Then why go on?"

Can a Devonsher make good when all goes wrong? In the next instalment Eve's situation seems to become worse than ever—in April EVERYBODY'S, on sale March 15.

"Would you have Germany win?" asked the major.

"Certainly not."

"She will, though," returned Peter, "if there are enough of the Allies of your temper. My God, Miss Devonsher, go into the fight and take what comes! Or are the Devonshers all moral cowards?"

IT WAS a shot in the dark but Eve turned on him as though he had struck her in the face.

"The Devonshers, Major Colbath, fear neither God, man, nor the devil."

"But they fear life—the common lot—their own heritage?" drawled Peter.

Eve continued to stare at him, nostrils dilated, eyes wide with a fear he could not fathom. "Their own heritage!" she repeated. A long pause. "You ask me to go back into a nightmare," she said, "when I have a right to waken into peace."

"By means of a bullet?"

"By means of a bullet," Eve replied. She turned from him and stood with her eyes fastened on the grove of cedars—the fairy ring where she had made her camp. She stood so long that Peter was swaying with the pain of his wounded leg when she turned.

"Judge Willy Jones!" she called. "If you will cook me a slice of antelope steak for my dinner, I'll agree to go back to the Basin with you, without further protest."

"Start the fire, major, and put the coffee pot on," cried the judge, fording the creek as he spoke.

"What's the idea, Eve?" asked Sid suspiciously, pausing before her with the frying pan in his hand.

Eve laughed. "Sid, you're a musician, not a lawyer. Why try to understand legal minds like Willy Jones's and mine?"

Sid laughed with her. "You're right, Eve! And honest, I'm just doing my duty as I see it. I like you. Why, my father served your grandfather."

He put a fat hand on Eve's arm. She struck it from her with passionate fury.

"Don't lay finger on me, you—you server of Devonshers!" she exclaimed.

Punctilious Parbold

The Author of "The Broken Nose" and "The Dancer of Paris" Joins a Whimsical Gentleman in a Search for Romance

By Michael Arlen

Illustration by Gerald Leake

THE history of Mr. Parbold before this tale finds him is not very interesting. There is no record of any one until this date having found either the history or anything else about Mr. Parbold at all interesting. Mr. Parbold was quite aware of that, but he did not see how it could be otherwise, for he was not a vain man.

Mr. Parbold, though he would earnestly deprecate the necessity, calls for some introduction. Meet Mr. Parbold. He is a small, thin man with a round face, eager blue eyes, and a gray affair which is easily recognizable as a mustache by the local fauna surrounding it.

During the summer Mr. Parbold carried an overcoat over one arm and in one hand an umbrella, which was folded with ambition rather than accuracy. During the winter he wore the overcoat, but the umbrella was no further advanced toward that symmetrical elegance which has made umbrellas what they are.

Mr. Parbold was a childless widower; and though to be a childless widower is generally considered to be a lonely way of life by students of that kind of thing, Mr. Parbold was not sensibly depressed by his lonely state.

Mr. Parbold was interested in many things, but the things he was most interested in were types. He found types by looking about him. "Always keep your eyes open," was Mr. Parbold's motto, and it is not at all a bad motto, really: although it may place a man who has followed it too carefully in a position wherein one of his

eyes must automatically close in sharp reaction to a harder substance.

Having dined at his boarding-house near Russell Square, he would walk out into the streets and pass the evening in agreeable contemplation. Mr. Parbold loved London, the byways and highways of London, but particularly he loved the byways. They thrilled him. But it was upon a highway that Mr. Parbold entered Society.

THERE are, as is well known, many approved ways of entering Society, the chief being: frontward, backward, sideways, purse first. Mr. Parbold entered Society backward, one night as he was trotting across the Haymarket and looking about him. If he had been looking behind him he would never have entered Society, for he would have seen the large motor-car, the right-side mudguard of which caught him sharply in the small of his back. Mr. Parbold bit the dust.

"Hey, there!" said the chauffeur angrily. "Messin' abaht all over the road!" said the chauffeur angrily.

"You knocked me down!" panted Mr. Parbold from the road. And then only did he become aware of a tall and beautiful young lady, who had descended from the motor-car and was helping him to rise.

"Oh, I *am* sorry!" whispered the tall and beautiful young lady.

She was the most beautiful creature Mr. Parbold had ever seen, had ever dreamt of. She was so tall, and her expression was so kind and grave! Her voice was so low, like the rustle of hidden water! And over her

evening dress she wore a fur coat which seemed to Mr. Parbold to dance with silver lights, and on her uncovered hair the great arc lamp above spilled something that was more glorious than gold.

"I'm quite all right, really!" panted Mr. Parbold.

"Nonsense!" said the lady with the golden head. "You *must* be hurt, after that bang!"

"No, really!" protested Mr. Parbold. "I assure you——"

"'E's all right, my lady," said the chauffeur; and he looked with contempt at Mr. Parbold, who blinked back at him. "Arentchew? And 'ere's your umbrella!" And he gave Mr. Parbold his umbrella, as a man might give another a rotten banana.

"I never heard such a thing!" vividly cried the tall lady: but her cry was like to the whisper of a mortal woman. "Hebblethwaite, how dare you suggest that this gentleman is not hurt!"

"Well, my lady, 'e said himself——"

"That was very sweet of him, to *pretend*! In future, Hebblethwaite, you will oblige me by keeping your mudguards more to yourself." She turned on Mr. Parbold with a very grave smile. "Mr.—er——"

~~Parbold,~~ he supplied.

"Mr. Parbold, you *must* come home with me and rest a little while. I insist. I am rather good at insisting. Please!"

Mr. Parbold blinked at her, tried to catch and remember forever the lilt of her sad sweetness, and found himself beside her in the dark tonneau of the car. It was a very smooth car.

"I do so hate running over people!" miserably said the lips of the hair that was more glorious than gold.

"But I assure you," panted Mr. Parbold, "I'm not hurt at all. Really I'm not!"

The fur coat which shone with silver lights touched his protesting hand.

"Mr. Parbold," said she of the low, low voice, "it is a very long time since I came upon such a sweet little man as you. So please don't ever say again that you were not hurt by my car. It is a reflection on my car, Mr. Parbold——"

"I assure you," panted Mr. Parbold, "that I didn't mean——"

"That is all over now," the lady forgave him graciously. "Ah, here we are!"

Mr. Parbold had not an intimate acquaintance with the squares of Mayfair, but he knew Berkeley Square when he saw it. The car had pulled up before a very large, ancient house, a palace of a house, the sort of house wherein great men must have died and gracious women lived.

THE heavily studded door of the house was opened to the tall lady and Mr. Parbold. A butler with a shining red face stood within. Mr. Parbold loathed him on sight, but he did not appear to notice Mr. Parbold.

"Any message, Hurst?"

"Nothing, my lady," said the butler: and he seemed to enjoy saying it, and Mr. Parbold loathed him.

The tall lady looked very thoughtful and miserable, and Mr. Parbold almost dared to be sorry for her. But he was so shy, he could not speak, could not think. My lady! Of course he had met a "my lady" or two before—they are all over the place nowadays—but the "my ladys" he had met had been the wives of knights.

Mr. Parbold was quite certain that this tall lady with the grave, beautiful face was much more than the wife of a knight. She was probably the wife of an earl or a marquis. Mr. Parbold was no snob, but he was human. And she looked at him in such a kind, friendly way!

She said to the butler:

"Hurst, open one of whichever his Lordship considers to be his best champagne, and——"

"Please——" began Mr. Parbold.

The large red face of the butler shone on him and silenced him.

"His Lordship," said the butler, "has directed that no wines, spirits, liqueurs or ales shall be extracted from the wine cellar during his Lordship's absence."

"Nonsense!" cried the lady.

And Mr. Parbold gasped, for the lady's face was like the face of a dove which has just heard a dreadful thing.

"Those, my lady, were his Lordship's very words," said the butler: and Mr. Parbold loathed him. "His Lordship further substantiated his orders by taking with him the keys of the wine cellar."

"Oh, this is *too* much!" pleaded the tall lady: and she looked down at Mr. Parbold with sad eyes.

"There is some ginger beer in the pantry, my lady," said the butler.

"I assure you," panted Mr. Parbold, "that I'd prefer ginger beer to champagne. Any day. Really."

The lady seemed to stare long at him, with blue eyes dark with grief.

"Haven't I already said," she murmured, "that you were a sweet little man? And now that I have seen the program, I *know* that you are. . . . Hurst, bring the ginger beer into the drawing-room, with an appropriate number of glasses and some digestive biscuits. Or"—she swiftly turned to Mr. Parbold—"perhaps, after your accident, you would prefer something more substan—"

"I love digestive biscuits!" hastily pleaded Mr. Parbold.

The wide, dim drawing-room into which the tall lady led him was lit by shaded lights in precious vases, colored, curling vases on tall stands; and the calm light therefrom fell like a caress on the old golds and ancient velvets, the chairs and shining tables of quality. And by the restless comfort of his feet Mr. Parbold knew himself to be standing on an Aubusson carpet. Things you only see in museums! And his shoes were dirty. . . .

"Do sit down, Mr. Parbold," begged the lady; and Mr. Parbold sat down on the nearest chair, and tried not to think of the golden shadows that the calm light chased across the lady's curling hair. She was very tired, he saw, and he was dreadfully afraid of being a nuisance. And he did not know what to say!

She sat in a chair that had a high oaken back; and light from a vase of chrysoprase on a tall golden stand made a halo of graciousness about her. And the chinchilla coat fell in careless folds about her; she wore it as though it might be any sort of coat, which is of course the proper way to wear a chinchilla coat.

THE ginger beer and digestive biscuits came, and Mr. Parbold was glad of a chance to do something. He fussed about.

"Mr. Parbold!" called the lady softly.

"Eh—yes?"

"You see, I am very lonely to-night, Mr. Parbold. And I was very lonely last night, and also the night before that. That makes three lonely nights, doesn't it?"

"But I don't understand!" stammered Mr. Parbold. "Lonely! You!"

"Yes, you nice man—me! But before that I was not lonely. Far from it, Mr. Parbold. And that is why I feel my loneliness so much, you see. But do have some more ginger beer."

"Eh—thank you." And Mr. Parbold drank deeply, not knowing what else to do.

"You see," the lady explained, "my husband left me three days ago——"

"Left *you*!" cried Mr. Parbold.

"Yes, he left me," repeated the lady, and was silent awhile. And her eyes seemed to Mr. Parbold to be gazing into a beautiful garden strewn with dead flowers. At last, she spoke again.

"You see, Mr. Parbold, we quarreled. We had just returned from our honeymoon, and we had never quarreled before, and so we did not know how to quarrel and we made an awful mess of it. Do you know how to quarrel, Mr. Parbold?"

Mr. Parbold remembered the lady who had made him a widower.

"I have a rather broad experience of being quarreled with," he said.

But the lady seemed not to be listening.

"The worst of it is," she said fretfully, "that I haven't the faintest idea what we quarreled about! You see, we got so excited about it that what we were quarreling about got quite overlaid with the things we were saying to each other. I'm quite sure that he hasn't the faintest idea now what we quarreled about, and as I haven't either, it makes things rather awkward, doesn't it? Because, you see, Mr. Parbold, we don't know who is to forgive who and whom is to be forgiven by who. Oh, bother these who's and whom's!"

"But surely!" protested Mr. Parbold. "Why don't you both forgive each other?"

"But I don't know where he is!" cried the lady miserably; and Mr. Parbold was silent before the great blue eyes that were shining with tears. The poor lady!

"You see, Mr. Parbold, he has just disappeared off the face of the earth, as far as I know! I have tried to find him, just to settle this forgiving business, but no one knows where he is! As he is a peer I thought he might have taken a room at the House of Lords—peers do go there, don't they, Mr. Parbold? Naturally they must go somewhere. But they told me at the

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"E's all right, my lady," said the chauffeur with contempt. "I never heard of such a thing!" cried the tall lady. "How dare you suggest that this gentleman is not hurt!"

reception office that they hadn't seen him for ages and that they didn't have bedrooms anyway, as the benches were considered so agreeable for sleeping on; and so then I didn't know what to do! After all, Mr. Parbold, if a peer isn't at the House of Lords where can he be, unless it's the divorce court or the bankruptcy court? And I *know* he isn't at either of those places because he was always very careful about details. Oh, I am so miserable!"

Mr. Parbold tried to make sympathetic noises, but finally lapsed into silence. He could not understand how beauty so kind and grave could be in such a pass.

"Fancy her husband leaving her!" thought Mr. Parbold. "*Her!* Oh, youth is so kind in happiness, so cruel in misunderstanding! Oh, the cruelties of kind people are the worst cruelties of all!"

And a clock broke the silence of the dim room with twelve cameo notes.

"I say!" said Mr. Parbold, jumping to his feet. "Kept you up all this time!"

The tall lady looked at him thoughtfully.

"Mr. Parbold, I am more grateful to you than I can say. You are the sort of a man a woman can talk to about other men, and that means you are the rarest kind of man in the world. Dear Mr. Parbold, you are the sort of man that women dream about in lonely moments."

Mr. Parbold flushed. Dear Heaven, there were women who could speak to men like this! Gracious women. And he had lived fifty years and had not known it until this moment.

And the lady stood and shook Mr. Parbold's hand.

"Of course," she said, "you will allow the car to see you to your door."

"Really, I assure you!" panted Mr. Parbold. "Love walking——"

"Nonsense!" said the lady.

And then he remembered something which the quality of his new golden friend had driven out of his mind, and he also remembered that he was very tired, and he protested no more.

"Good-by, sweet man!" whispered the tall lady; and then Mr. Parbold understood how men could come to kill themselves for women, and he did the most amazing thing he had ever done in his life: he jerked his head down and kissed the lady's hand.

And, grabbing up his belongings, he trotted out of the room. . . .

"Good-by, good-by, sweet man!" called the low, low voice.

"Good-by, my lady," panted Mr. Parbold, and pulled open the front door.

OUTSIDE, at the head of the broad steps, he stood and breathed deeply. For that night there had happened to Mr. Parbold the most beautiful thing that can happen to any man in this imperfect world. He had been trusted by a woman. . . .

The dark, long, low shape of the car was by the curb. A man, a tall shape of a man, stood beside the car, talking to the chauffeur, who was at the driving wheel. As Mr. Parbold closed the door of the house behind him, the tall shape of the man walked quickly away.

"Eh!" said Mr. Parbold to the chauffeur. "Her Ladyship has asked me to ask you to drive me home."

"Ho!" said the chauffeur nastily.

Mr. Parbold blinked at him with a new force, and drew himself up. He really hadn't very much to draw up.

"You just do as you're told!" said Mr. Parbold.

"Ho, will I!" said the chauffeur.

But Mr. Parbold disdained to debate the matter further, and, giving him his address, plunged into the dark tonneau of the car.

The chauffeur seemed to have lost his partiality for speed since his contact with Mr. Parbold in the Haymarket. Had he not been told to keep his mudguards more to himself in future? He drove his car round the broad sweep of Berkeley Square as though the very idea of speed pained him. Taxis bustled by. And Mr. Parbold thrust his head out of the window.

"My idea," he snapped, "was to get to Bloomsbury to sleep, not for breakfast."

"Ho, was it!" growled the chauffeur.

And then, as Mr. Parbold leant back in the elegant interior of the car, something dark and long jumped on to the footboard, flung open the door, and had Mr. Parbold by the throat.

The car stopped in Davies Street, just by Claridge's. The chauffeur twisted his head round and enjoyed himself.

"You little rat!" snarled the something dark and long.

Mr. Parbold gurgled and kicked frantically.

"So she likes you, does she! She sits up with you till all hours, does she! You nasty little rat!" And the young man, for it was a young man, screwed Mr. Parbold's head from side to side. But suddenly Mr. Parbold jerked himself free.

"Likes *me!*" he panted. "You're mad. Mad!"

"Of course I'm mad!" whispered the young man, and struck Mr. Parbold on the ear. Mr. Parbold hit back vindictively, but without apparent effect. "Of course I'm mad! Can you give me any good reason why I shouldn't be mad, you inadequate piece of kitchen furniture, you bit of cast-off flannelette from a bankrupt bargain sale, you— Oh, my God, and she can spend hours with you, while I'm——"

"You're not——" gasped Mr. Parbold.

"My name is Limehouse," snarled the young man.

"The Earl of Limehouse!"

"Good God!" cried the young man. "What's the good of being a snob when one can't even keep one's wife!"

"But you can!" gasped Mr. Parbold. "She wants you——"

"But you!"

"I'm only an—eh—accident!"

"Liar! Why, my chauffeur told me——"

"He's a liar," snapped Mr. Parbold.

"And you, Lord Limehouse, are a cad—to have had your wife watched!"

The young man's hands felt for Mr. Parbold's throat, but only grasped his tie. He pulled Mr. Parbold's tie hard.

"Look here," he said fiercely. "I didn't have my wife watched. I merely happened to be passing the house, to catch a glimpse of the scene of my past happiness, when the chauffeur happened to mention that a little rat of a man had pretended to be run over by the car in the Haymarket and had then persuaded my wife to take him home, where he had spent hours in a room alone with her——"

"She was telling me about *you!*" cried Mr. Parbold. And a great gaiety overspread him. "Oh, dear! You *are* an ass, Lord Limehouse!"

"What!"

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Parbold. "Go back to your wife at once! It's perfectly

ridiculous, all this wife-leaving business—and such a wife! She loves you, Lord Limehouse! And she begs your forgiveness——"

"But it's I who must beg her forgiveness!" cried the young man.

"Well, you can fight that out between you," sighed Mr. Parbold. "Now be a good boy and go straight home, Lord Limehouse. Your lady awaits you."

And the young man started up to the window and made a great shout to the chauffeur: "Home, home! Like lightning!"

THEN swiftly went the car, and the young man leant back and sighed.

Round the broad curve of Berkeley Square swept the car, and stopped. Mr. Parbold said:

"Eh—thank you, Lord Limehouse. I think I will walk home from here."

The young man, with his hand on the door, looked deeply into Mr. Parbold's face.

"Look here," he said. "I'm very grateful to you. I am indeed."

"I assure you!" said Mr. Parbold. "Be grateful to beauty, youth, God. Good night, Lord Limehouse."

The young man stepped out of the car and ran up the broad steps. He turned to Mr. Parbold on the pavement.

"Look here," he said fiercely. "You wait a moment. *Please* wait a moment."

Mr. Parbold waited several moments. He did not want to, but neither did he want to seem discourteous.

Berkeley Square was as still as a crypt. The chauffeur looked at Mr. Parbold.

"I say!" said Mr. Parbold. "You will get the sack tomorrow."

"Ho, will I!" said the chauffeur. "And who cares if I do! Silly haristocrats!"

The door behind them opened, and a man and a woman stood in the doorway. Mr. Parbold blinked at them, and was very shy. The two figures seemed to him like delicious sentinels at the gates of a clean, gracious life.

"Nice man," called the low, low voice, "will you come and dine with us tomorrow night? Please!"

"Look here," said the young man. "You *must*, you know!"

"Thank you, thank you," panted Mr. Parbold.

Another of Michael Arlen's modern fairy-tales for grown-ups next month—in April EVERYBODY'S.

The Golden Bum

*A Wall Street Man Falls into a Fortune—and
Doesn't Recognize It Till It's Forced upon Him*

By Richard Connell

HECTOR J. GOWER, plutocrat, gave the buzzer-button on his mahogany desk a dig with an obese thumb. One of his many secretaries popped into the room with a secretarial genuflection.

"Tell Mr. Robert I'll see him now," Mr. Gower said gruffly, as he bit off the end of a bulbous, black cigar that cost a school-teacher's daily wage.

Robert was his only son. He had filed a memorandum asking for an interview with his father three days before.

Bob entered with a great show of briskness.

"Well?" shot out Mr. Gower, senior.

Bob knew better than to waste words.

"Two things," he said. "First, when are you going to take a vacation? Second, I want to give all the men in the New York office two weeks off this summer."

Bob's title was General Manager of the New York office. His father regarded him as too easy-going to be really efficient. He admitted, however, that at twenty-eight Bob did have an unusual knack for getting along with people. Men liked to work for him.

Hector Gower took a puff on his opulent cigar, that was almost a snort.

"Hang it all!" he said. "I told you once that I don't believe in vacations. I don't want one. I never took one in my life. Why should I go down in my pocket to let a lot of young whippersnappers get sunburned? They get Saturday afternoons and Sundays and holidays, don't they? What do they want? The earth?"

"Other companies give vacations," began Bob.

"Yes, and they aren't as successful as the Gower companies, are they?" demanded Hector. "I tell you I don't believe in this pampering and coddling. Men ought to get their pleasure out of their work. That's what they were put in the world for. If they don't want to work here, let 'em go elsewhere."

He poised a thumb over the buzzer to signify that the interview was over.

"But what about yourself?" Bob knew that Hector was interested in that topic. "You're fifty-four, you know—and not as thin as you used to be. Better take a rest, don't you think? A month or two off—go fishing, perhaps——"

The thumb descended abruptly on the buzzer button. A secretary popped into the room. Bob, seeing that it was useless to say more, returned to his own office.

The newspapers referred variously to Hector J. Gower as a Colossus of Finance, a Captain of Industry, a Titan of Trade and a Money King. In Wall Street he was called, though never to his face, "Bull" Gower; and the title was apposite.

He had snorted, ripped, trampled, plunged and torn his way to great wealth and power, and to-day, in manner and aspect, he was not unlike some ponderous Holstein monarch.

HECTOR'S story is a fairly common one in annals of American business. At fourteen he was wrapping up cranberries, soap and gingham in the general store of Henry Terwilliger at Hooley, Ohio (pop. 391). He slept under the counter, thus

saving lodging money, and lived on dried apples and crackers from the store, thus saving board. He received, as every child who reads the success magazines knows, \$1.50 a week, of which he saved one dollar and a half.

At twenty-three he owned a string of stores. At thirty he organized his first trust. At fifty he had become a person of terrifying importance, so unbending, dignified, aloof, that to ordinary mortals, like us, he seemed not a person but an Institution or a Legend.

That he had any human weaknesses was unthinkable; it seemed incredible that the great Hector Gower should hesitate nonplused over a tray of French pastry; or that he should fear a hat-check boy's disdain; or that he should laugh when a fat man slipped on a vacant banana; or that he should worry about his liver. When his time comes to die every one will be amazed that he should make this concession to human frailty. No one will be sorry.

As he sat at his massive desk—suggesting somehow an ocean liner in dock—reverential underlings brought documents to be signed and he quickened their steps with roared orders.

He was the mainspring of a vast, complex financial machine.

At a word from him the price of butter went up two cents in a thousand chain stores, one less oyster was put in the stews of a thousand white-tiled restaurants, the bootblacks in a thousand railroad stations trembled for their jobs, and five Senators grew pale. At his sneeze six banks in Tokio suspended payments, and a sardine cannery in Maine ceased to can. At his frown, cotton, linseed oil and leather findings dropped nine points. The eyes of the whole world, so it seemed, were focused on Hector J. Gower, and the least of his words were relayed around the world and on the bourses were weighed, interpreted, acted upon. Fortunes were lost the day he first showed signs of dyspepsia.

Of all the thousands of men who worked for him no one was busier than Hector Gower himself. The story that he had installed a private time-clock in his own office which he punched with faithful regularity was given wide circulation.

Hector Gower had two very pronounced obsessions. They constituted a paradox.

He loved fame. And he hated publicity. It was his bitterest complaint that he couldn't pull down his vest or stroke his chin without the paper's printing a story about it, and a diagram with X marking the spot where the momentous thing occurred.

"A man of affairs has no privacy," he would say. He was known to have punched camera men.

And yet it was the wish nearest his heart that the name Hector Gower should be known in every side street and alley of the universe. He wanted "Gower" to become synonymous with "power." It was his hope—and indeed his belief—that no one in the civilized globe mentioned his name without adding, in a reverent whisper—"the great financier."

Hector Gower gave the overworked buzzer another prod. A sleek secretary appeared, jinnee-like.

"Tibbits," snapped Hector Gower, "see that my bag is packed for three days. Have my car attached to the Twentieth Century. I'm going to Chicago to-night—to smash that tin-can combine. I'll be back Friday—perhaps Saturday."

Tibbits bowed and vanished. Hector seized a paper from a high-piled basket on his desk, and studied it, with a frown. A disquieting thought seemed to interrupt his perusal.

"Vacations?" he muttered, between cigar-puffs. "Humph! I'll vacation 'em."

AN AGILE, ubiquitous mosquito, and Hector Gower in a nightshirt of fine linen, were the only occupants of his elaborate private car as it glided through Ohio that sultry June night, headed for Chicago. Between the mosquito and the heat, Hector Gower could not sleep. He tossed about; he drank cooling drinks in vain. At last he got up and went out to the observation platform of his car, sprawled in a wicker easy-chair and watched the nocturnal scenery shoot past. He grew cooler and more at peace with the world.

The train slowed down a bit and, by the flickering light of a station lamp, Hector read the name of a station: "Grantville."

Grantville! The name gave a jolt to Hector Gower's memory. For Grantville was the place where, thirty years or more ago, he had courted Robert's mother. It was the place, also, where he had saved his

first thousand dollars. If Hector Gower had any tender memories in a mind crammed with deals and figures, they were connected with Grantville, and with Hooley, twenty miles farther along, where his boyhood had been spent; for even he had had a boyhood of a sort.

What a lot of water had gone over the dam since those days! By George, he did have fun catching catfish in the Skinner River. Were any left? He wondered. A long suppressed desire asserted itself. He'd like to spend a day fishing for catfish. He'd like—well, why couldn't he? He, the master of millions! No, there was this meeting in Chicago to-morrow; then a conference on those copper mines as he whizzed back to New York on the train; then that steamship company's affairs had to be straightened out; then that South American oil business, and so ad infinitum. Besides, if he came back to Hooley, silk-hatted, cutaway-coated, batteries of movie operators would follow him, a band would probably meet him at the station, and all the inhabitants would be self-conscious or fawning, in the hope that he would give them a library or a fire engine or something. Ugh!

Suddenly a thought struck him that made him smite the shiny brass gates of the platform with his big hand.

By George! He was really the prisoner of his wealth. Here he wanted to do a simple little thing like trying to catch a catfish or two in the Skinner River and he couldn't do it. The whole world would hear about it and discuss it. The costume he wore would be the subject of lively debates. The catfish, if he caught one, would be photographed, weighed, stuffed, and perhaps hung up in the Union League Club.

He was Hector Gower, the great financier, and what good did it do him? The veriest clerk in any of his thousands of stores or banks or factories was more free than he.

It had been such fun to lie all day Sunday in the cool shade on the banks of the Skinner, in a cotton shirt and overalls, or perhaps, nothing at all, catching fish, or taking a swim whenever you felt like it. And my, didn't those catfish smell good when you and Herv Smalley popped them into an ancient frying-pan over a twig fire! And oh, how good they tasted when you ate them brown and crisp and hot from the pan! The smell and taste of them came down

through the years to him. And, he remembered with an inward groan, he would never experience that delight again. He was Hector Gower, and catfish were beneath his dignity. Besides, he was a dyspeptic, a nibbler of toast and a bibber of cultured milk.

The flying train would be nearing Hooley in a minute and would soon pass over the trestle that crossed the winding, shallow Skinner.

Hector Gower leaned far out to get one full sniff of the well-remembered scent—a baffling combination of locust blossoms and mud flats.

And then!

The shiny brass gates gave way with a snap, and a fat financier in a fine linen night-shirt shot through the air, and missing the wooden trestle by a flapper's eyebrow, landed in one foot of muddy water, and two feet of the blackest and stickiest mud in these or any other United States.

A dictaphone, had one been on the spot, would have recorded two sounds:

Flampf.

Woo-oo-oo-oosh.

The "flampf" was caused by Hector Gower's broad face and well-cushioned frame striking the mud and water. The "woo-oo-oo-oosh" was the breath being knocked out of the great man.

LIKE a Gargantuan mud-turtle, Hector Gower emerged, stickily, from the Skinner. His iron-gray mustache and hair were caked with rich, black mud. There was mud in his ears. He sat panting, palpitating on the bank.

By Gad! This would cost somebody a pretty penny. Defective gates!

Why, he, Hector Gower, might have been killed! He felt of his ribs, gingerly, and found they were intact. He busied himself scraping the mud from his torso with a stick. He could scrape off only a little at a time. It tickled.

What should he do? He had but to walk down the track till he sighted a human habitation, announce himself, and be given the best bed, and deferential treatment. He started to follow this plan, but the cinders cut his feet. He decided to wait till daybreak. He sat down in a clump of bushes. It occurred to him that he was tired. The smell of locust blossoms and mud flats was sweet to his nostrils. He

wondered if he might not pause long enough in the morning to catch just one catfish. He closed his eyes.

The sun was riding high when Hector Gower woke. He observed, with a startled stare, his surroundings, and his mud-caked nightshirt. Then he remembered. He decided that it would be easier on his feet to take the dusty highroad that led toward the hamlet of Hooley.

It amused him to think of the sensation he was creating, and was about to create.

In Chicago, consternation! The newspapers full of headlines about him: "GOWER GONE—Titan of Finance Mysteriously Missing—Did He Fall or Was He Pushed?"

There would be excursions and alarms.

Then he pictured the amazement of the farmer whom he would presently approach.

"My friend," he would say, "I am Hector Gower." (Farmer registers astounded awe.) "I just fell from my private car." (Farmer registers deep concern.) "Kindly get me some clothes, and get Mr. Millership, president of the First Bank of Chicago, on the long-distance phone for me." (Farmer bestirs himself to do the great man's bidding.)

He became conscious that his garb was hardly a dignified one. A brief, mud-plastered nightshirt, even of finest linen, is no fit garment for a Colossus of Finance—especially if he be quite plump—to appear in, in public. But the main difficulty was providentially solved. He spied an old, oil-spotted, tattered pair of overalls hanging on a fence near the railroad track. He put them on.

He walked slowly, and with as much dignity as he could muster, down the road. He felt very much in need of breakfast.

A small, white farm-house came into view. Smoke was curling up from its chimney, and the overalled figure of a man could be seen, busy at the woodpile.

HECTOR opened a creaking gate and walked up a poppy-lined path toward the figure. The man, on seeing him, straightened up and rubbed his eyes. Then he took off his steel spectacles, polished them with a red handkerchief, set them back on his thin, vermilion nose and peered at the alarming spectacle Hector Gower presented. The farmer was a weazened, old man, about half as big as Hector.

"My friend," began Hector Gower in his most commanding bass voice, "I am *Hector Gower!*"

"You git to hell outen here, whoever you are," shrilled the farmer, reaching for a pitchfork.

"But I tell you I'm Hector Gower," cried Hector.

"Well, I ain't denyin' it, am I? I don't care who you be. I won't have no lousy bums traipsin' round my place. Git!"

"But I'm *the* Hector Gower—Wall Street, you know," protested the great man, in a tone that for him was exceedingly conciliatory.

"Well, Hector, you git back to Wall Street, and git mighty soon! I wouldn't be surprised if you was one of the crooks that did me out of sixteen dollars in 1908." The farmer was waxing more wrathful.

"But surely you've heard of me," said Hector. "You know Gower. Gower! Gower!"

"Well," admitted the farmer, "I was readin' a piece in the paper about a feller named Gower who didn't believe in vacations. He's the only Gower I ever heerd tell of. If I thought you was him I'd set the dog on ye."

Hector was too shocked to say anything for a full minute. So this was his famel! The man who didn't believe in vacations!

The farmer snapped him out of his coma.

"Now, are you goin' to git, or do you want to be the breakfast for a healthy bulldog?" he demanded. Then he called, "Here, Pershing, Pershing, Pershing!"

A hungry bark and the scrambling of canine feet around the corner of the house warned Hector that he had better flee, and flee he did, with a portly but rapid trot. Pershing lost the race to the gate by inches.

Hector Gower felt a blind, bull-like fury surge through him—the sort that had made great bankers cower. He'd show that miserable wart of a man—he'd show him—but Pershing's hungry, disappointed growl told him he had better not attempt any reprisals just then.

So Hector continued along the road, until he came to another farm-house, from which came a tantalizing odor. Hector recognized it. Fried catfish!

Humbly and, for the first time in years, a bit timidly, Hector Gower approached

the back door and knocked. A fat farmer came to the door.

"I am Hector Gower," said the great man, impressively.

The fat farmer let forth a bellow of raucous laughter.

"Hey, Jen! Hey, Jen!" he shouted back into the house. "Come a-runnin'. The frowsiest bum I ever sot eyes on is out here, claimin' he's Hector Gower."

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed his wife, appearing with a platter of fried catfish. "Ef he ain't the beatin'est. Hector Gower?" She echoed her husband's laughter.

Hector eyed the fish hungrily.

"Say!" the woman demanded, in a voice that was not unkind. "Ef you wanted to pick out somebody to be, why did you pick out that ol' heathen Hector Gower? Why, the papers say he don't believe in givin' his hired men vacations."

"But I tell you I am the real Hector Gower," insisted the financier.

"There, there!" said the woman, in a soothing voice. "You kin be Napoleon, or William Jennings O'Brien, or anybody you please. Bums is always great men. Why, I've fed three Rockefellers, a couple of Vanderbilts, Rudyard Kipling and Sherlock Holmes on this very doorstep! If it's a meal you want, why don't you say so like a man—not try to put on airs?"

"Well," said Hector, "I am hungry. That's a fact. You see I fell from my private car while crossing the Skinner."

The fat farmer evidently thought this screaming. He fairly whooped.

"He fell? Did ye hear that? His private car? Oh, my poor sides. Did ye hear that, Jen. His private car! That's a hot one. Guess you haven't traveled this route before, Mr. Bum-Gower. Why, Skinner River is where they always chuck off all the bums."

The wife appeared with a bar of soap and a towel. "Here," she said, thrusting them at Hector. "Make yourself decent, at the pump. Guess we can spare you a few catfish. You kin have some ef you'll help a spell with the chores."

THE Captain of Industry sat gratefully on the back steps and for the first time in months relished his breakfast. His dyspepsia seemed to fade away before the magic of fried catfish and a real outdoor

appetite. When he had finished, seven little tails told of seven catfish departed.

As he munched the crisp, browned fish, Hector Gower was thinking. Was he really his own master? Didn't his affairs really entangle him, surround him, strangle him—as a many-tentacled octopus might? Did he own his companies, or did they own him? By right, he should be even now pounding a table at a directors' meeting in Chicago, domineering, scheming. Instead, how comfortable, how restful to sit in the shade, and drink in the scents of June in the country, so different from the asphalt and gasoline perfume of the big city! But it was an accident. To-morrow he would be forced back into the place he had carved for himself in the scheme of things. To-morrow he would be high-hatted, cutaway-coated, stiff-collared. But to-day he was in overalls. To-morrow the weight of responsibility would bear down on him again. But to-day he was—free! Free to go fishing. Free to roam whither he would. No prying eyes. No cameras. Exercise, freedom from worry and rush—that's what his dyspepsia needed. And, by George, that's what his soul needed!

They didn't believe he was really Hector Gower. Then he wouldn't be.

He set about his task of splitting kindling wood. At noon the housewife expressed herself as well pleased with his industry.

"The way you piled that there wood shows you got a good head, if you was a mind to use it," she said, and added: "It's a pity some men is so shiftless. What was you before you became a tramp?"

Hector, by a rapid twist of his tongue, turned "financier" into "fisherman."

"Well," said the woman, "how would you like to go out to the Skinner this afternoon and ketch a mess of catfish for to-morrow's breakfast?"

Would he? In a battered straw hat—such as mules wear—a blue shirt, overalls, and clodhopper shoes, the Titan of Trade sat all that dreamy, delicious afternoon in the haunts of his boyhood by the meandering Skinner. Now and then he would jerk out a shining fish. They were biting well. It was the most perfect day he could remember. Banks, stocks, panics, corners, prices and the hurly-burly of it all seemed centuries away. Sometimes he dozed, to be wakened by the tug of a finny victim. He

let his bare feet dabble in the cool stream.

At sundown he brought twenty-seven catfish, and a ravenous appetite, back to the farm-house.

He rapped at the back door. The minute the wife came to the door, he feared the worst. She was obviously dressed up, in a blue and white polka-dot dress, white stockings, polished shoes, and a company manner. Also, she was obviously embarrassed.

"Drop them fish right there, Mr. Gower," she said, in a nervous voice. "James will fetch you his best suit to put on."

Hector Gower stared at her.

"Now you ain't goin' to be hard on two poor folks who was mistaken, are you? Ef it hadn't been for the mud, we'd have knowed you right off," she said.

"But I don't understand," said Hector Gower, although he understood all too well.

"Why, you *are* the rich Mr. Gower!" said the woman. "The evenin' paper just come from Columbus and it has your picture in it. They're draggin' all the rivers between Chicago and New York for your body."

"An' there's a reward of ten thousand dollars," added her husband, appearing in his Sunday celluloid collar.

Hector Gower thought rapidly, and then spoke swiftly.

"You'll get that reward. I give you my word you will. But don't give me up—just yet. Just let me stay here, and do chores, and sleep in your barn, and—go catfishing."

The next morning Hector Gower handed the farmer a note.

"Will you do me a great favor and take this down to Columbus and post it?" he said. "It's to my son."

ROBERT GOWER, in his New York office, found this note in his morning's mail, written in his father's familiar, bold scrawl:

DEAR SON:

You're old enough to take my place. Go to it. I'm taking a long vacation. If the newspapers ask where I am, just say I've gone catfishing.

HECTOR GOWER.

P. S. Give the boys all the vacation they can stand.

Speaking of April

IN EVERYBODY'S for April there will be a complete novel by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton. The title is "The Long Call" and the scenes are laid in the Northwest. Just the story, if you like plenty of action and good character drawing. In addition there will be *Seven Short Stories*.

"The Mystery of the Lost Bullion" is the second in the series by Frank Heller, author of "The Emperor's Old Clothes." Michael Arlen will have another distinguished story called "The Sheik of Alabam"; Sam Carson will have another racetrack snapshot, "Weather Clear, Track Fast"; Albert Richard Wetjen a story about a one-hundred-pound autocrat of the sea ("The Reckoning at Selapiu"), who never sent a man where he feared to go himself, and Artemus Calloway a worth-while sketch about animals—not those of the jungle, but the kind you find nearer home. Hugh Walpole, that prince of English writers, will be represented by a story called "Chinese Horses." If you have ever felt the fascination of a house you will read and remember "Chinese Horses."

And also in April you will meet a new author—F. H. Hicks—who in turn will present to you "Col. Steptoe of Kentucky—a gentleman of the old school, suh!" Col. Steptoe is now sojourning in New York—for which you may be inclined to sympathize with him. A gentleman—and of—the—old—school, and at the mercy of America's metropolitan madhouse. We think that you will agree that there is a fine chance for a good story here, and we think we have the story. Col. Steptoe will make his appearance in a story called "Forty Drops."

April *EVERYBODY'S*

Out March 15

A Novel Complete in This Issue

'N a s t a s i a

*Soviet Plotters Match Wits with Celtic Blood and
Newspaper Training, and Stirring Adventure Follows*

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Illustrations by Stockton Mulford

HARD by Victoria Station, between the station and the Embankment in the district called Pimlico, lies Green Arbor Walk. Even though you were a born Londoner you never could find this street without a guide nor, finding it, recognize a crooked cobble lane between palsied walls as Green Arbor Walk. For there is no green; there is no arbor. Just the leprous fronts of ancient houses ranged in two close-set ranks like battered dominoes whereof the windows are the spots. Behind the street is a wilderness of railroad yards and coal dumps. Before Green Arbor Walk, over beyond a battery of chimneypots, is the Thames, oily-black, flowing with a sucking noise of the tides.

The coal smoke from Victoria yards and the mists from the Thames have mingled over years to paint the fronts of houses on the Walk a uniform smeary gray-green—the color of stones in a root cellar. This gray-green seems to epitomize the tone and temper of the life that is the Walk's. Its few children who play at a noiseless hopscotch on the pavements carry the color in their cheeks. At nights its men returning from their office stools reflect the pallor of the walls from their faces under the gas lamps. Life here is but a thin wafer removed from the desperation of the slums; Green Arbor Walk folk cling to the threadbare respectability they fancy to be theirs with the grip of a drowning man to a spar.

A little sinister, too, is the atmosphere of

the Walk. Respectability there has worn through on occasions. There have been such things as cries in the night; sound of beatings.

At the far end of the Walk, where it turns into the Embankment under the black spans of Chelsea Bridge, stands a ramshackle building with a peeled front. Across its dingy façade the dim letters spelling "Empress Theater" still stand out against an allegorical frieze of painted muses. Theater it might have been in its heyday; probably it declined first to a music hall of the third order, then down another step to the questionable status of a dance hall. After that the battered gas lamp before its entrance flared no more, and orange peel and wind-blown bits of newspaper collected behind the iron screen before its locked doors.

This tale I am telling you has to do at this juncture with the Empress Theater in Green Arbor Walk. The time is the winter after the Armistice, when all Europe was lighted by a glare from Red Russia and everywhere was fear.

When watery twilight of a February afternoon was closing in on the Walk and the mists from the Thames already were blanketing chimneypots to drive their smoke down to the ground level, the dusty windows of the theater glimmered light from within. The padlock which for years had rusted on the hasp closing a stage door down a side alley hung open on the staple. The stage door was ajar.

Source of light which speared through cobwebbed windows arose from a row of pallid gas jets, three or four of them, set in a tin trough about the half-circle of a stage. So dim they were that the blackness of the interior was pushed back only a few yards. Forward of the lights was a hint of stalls, of torn chair backs and horsehair gushing out of wounds in upholstered settees; behind them the tatters of what once had been a forest set dribbled down from the supreme darkness of the drops. For the rest, beyond this grudging circle of light, naught but pitchy blackness. There was a mingled odor of mildew, of ancient liquor slops, and sachet; it seemed to make heavy the stale air like laundry steam.

Eyes growing accustomed to the darkness could pick out several figures beyond the light-well. Three in the shallow musicians' cubby below stage level; two men with violins and a third with a strange instrument of percussion, lyre-shaped and hung with metal discs to be struck. Three other men sat as spectators several stalls back from the stage edge; they were just rounded black humps above the general mean of the stalls' shallow level.

Silence. A man stepped out from the wings into the circle of light. A trick of the flickering gas jets made it appear that he was afire at the top, like a tree stump. For the whole head of him burned red. Flame of red for hair standing up in a great brush; red embers of a beard encircling his chin from ear to ear. His body was squat, grotesquely puffed, almost dwarfish.

The red man shouted something back into the wings, then turned to signal the musicians. They struck up a barbaric tune sounding like the neighing of mares and punctuated by heavy smiting of the tinkling metal of the tambourine. The red man leaped lightly down into the pit and groped a way to a seat with the three spectators.

OUT from the mildewed forest of the wings came leaping a dryad such as the Empress Theater, or all London for that matter, never had seen. The body of her was almost bare; only some shaggy gray skin was caught over one shoulder, and flying arms were ghostly in the gas flicker. Her head, thrown far back in wild abandon, dropped a swirling cloud of black hair over the wolf skin. Her two hands

were slipped into thongs of classic cymbals, hardly larger than halves of oranges and cupped like a halved orange; these she clashed together over her head with sharp cries.

The two fiddles whinnied and screamed. The tambourine player madly whipped his stick over the shivering rows of silver discs. And on that half-lit stage the frenzy of a bacchanal rose to fury.

Now, body bent far back and white limbs strutting out, the dancer approached a shrine of Dionysos visioned in her madness. There she postured in obeisance, gently clinking her cymbals, only to rise again to the tips of her toes and whirl in an abandon which was the giving of her lithe body to the joy of living. Grace and vitality were hers; that vitality of youth which is a poem without words. In the springing of her thin legs, the weaving of her arms around and through the night of her hair, lay all that poets of a golden age visioned—invitation to life, to pagan worship of the body in its perfection.

Suddenly the man with the burning head leaped from his seat and clambered over the footlights onto the stage. At sight of the bloated dwarf wabbling like some great beetle toward her, the little dancer suddenly broke her step, halted and stood with arms crossed over half-naked breast. Her attitude was one of cringing fear. The music jangled to a stop.

"'Nastasia, great clumsy she-calf!" The red man was on her with a bound. One ham-like hand swung back. The sound of the slap on bare shoulder was like the cracking of heavy glass. The girl staggered and lifted one hand to the splayed red mark on her flesh.

"This is the way that measure goes, imbecile!" His Russian speech crackled with spleen. He signaled to the orchestra, and when the measure was resumed the balloon-like body of the man dipped and undulated to the stridings of his stumpy legs—for all the world a comic satyr in this shadow grove of the Empress Theater's mysterious dark.

The girl called 'Nastasia watched her savage mentor through tear-dimmed eyes. The blow he had given her there before others' eyes, the sudden interruption of her dance, left her trembling and distraught. As if in this humiliation her semi-nakedness,



"This is the way that measure goes, imbecile!" The balloon-like body of the man dipped and undulated to the music—for all the world a comic satyr.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

39

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forgotten in the passion of the dance, had become a shameful thing, one hand strayed down to tug the wolf pelt lower over bare thighs; a pitifully cowering nymph there in the shabby glade of the gods.

"Leave the girl alone, Smirnoff," called a Russian voice from the dark pit. "She does very well."

"Well enough for the fool Popondrov, perhaps," the red man called Smirnoff belated back across the frontier of the dark. "But not for Admiral Andrevieff." Again he turned toward the shrinking girl in the wolf skin. "Now, little heifer, the whole dance once again. And, mind you, if you destroy the beauty of that fourth measure once more I'll take a whip to your thin legs!"

The fiddles chattered. The multiple tambourine filled the dark with its musical tinklings. And the girl 'Nastasia came on again from the wings, a timorous little dryad fleeing from a monster.

Meanwhile, back in the dark stalls the three spectators, joined now and again by the tyrant Smirnoff, conferred in muffled whispers. Their speech was a dialect of Great Russia, barbarous in its exploding aspirants.

Well might Green Arbor Walk, shivering in its night mists, have recalled sinister happenings on the street had it been privy to this conversation in the dark stalls of the Empress; in truth, well might certain secure citadels of the mighty in a much more favored section of London have looked to their moats and portcullises. For these men—Smirnoff, the red one, and the others—were come to see that a pitiful pawn in a big game had been well drilled to her part; now the first move was in their hands. This night was appointed for the making of their move.

TWO o'clock of a morning in Fleet Street, London's street of adventure. Rain snivels in the drains and hiccoughs from the gutters. A graveyard wind from the Thames slaps wet winding sheets against the blue arc-lights before the New Temple and aslant the blocks of lighted windows high above the pavement where news writers still potter over gossip of the world. In all this dead heart of London, which is, too, the heart of the world's news, not a sound; not so much as a footfall above the dull monotone of the rain, the ceaseless rain.

Jim Hagan of the American National Press let himself onto the street from a dim hallway of the building housing his office. He was finished with the late trick; last to go of the three correspondents whose job it was to build each day a news bridge between London and Red Bird, North Dakota, Sioux Falls and Dallas. Jim Hagan was dog-tired. His mind was blurred with overtones of the cables that had passed under his fingers; the stutter of the news tickers was still in his ears.

He walked up Fleet Street toward the Griffin and, arriving at a heavy gate set into the solid masonry of an arch, he rattatted a knocker. A night porter swung back the gate from within, sleepily exchanged a lighted lantern for a shilling tip and watched the figure in the raincoat stride down into a cave of echoes.

The Old Temple, unchanged by so much as a new door knocker since Charles and Mary Lamb starved genteelly in Pump Court, since Dickens peopled its flagged walks with romance, is a labyrinth bewildering enough in London's pale sunlight—quite impossible of conning in the night. Its ancient rookeries house barristers, journalists, decayed gentlemen, retired officers of the Indian Army. Its shy, lovely gardens occasionally are the retreat for lovers; more often shuffling old men in carpet slippers and with books under their arms dodder over their paths. With the roaring tide of Fleet Street not a hundred yards away, the Old Temple yet is buried a thousand leagues deep in its own mystery.

From the Fleet Street gate two turns to the left, one to the right and, beyond the wigmaker's in Lemon Court, the first door; so the solitary prowler turned his steps. He groped his way two flights up from the court entrance. As his head came to the level of the landing Hagan got a surprise. A dim flicker of firelight showed under the crack of his door. Hagan quickly turned his key in the latch and let himself in.

The room he entered—his lounge and library—showed dimly in the dying glow of coals which should not have been burning. Cautiously Hagan took two steps on tiptoe with nerves set against an encounter. Everything as it should be. His big wing chair, like a bishop in chintz vestments giving benediction, stood in its usual place before the grate. The littered table with

its reading lamp, tobacco jar, magazines, was in accustomed disorder.

Hagan felt a relaxing of the prick of vigilance as he tossed his hat into a corner and stripped off his dripping ulster. As he started to circle the big wing chair to poke up the fire his foot caught some obstruction and he pitched forward. One hand caught at the chair back, slipped over the peak and fell upon a tumble of floss.

A muffled shriek. Hagan reared back as if stung. He shot a quick look into the valley of the chair and saw to give him a heart-skip.

Eyes! Two eyes wide in terror like the eyes of some animal in a trap, so large the circle of white pupils. After the eyes the outline of the features of a girl, pushed out by man's fuddled perception. Eyes did not make ruddy the pallor, but the paper-white under fallen lids, appearing inky in contrast. A line of red marked the lips, very

A single swift movement of the chair. Hagan caught legs drawn up under the desk. Then he saw a pair of stockings behind the fire screen. Slippers high heels perched like hearthstone.

For a long minute the doors were locked.

"Well?" Hagan finished crisply. "Well!"

The girl in the chair, ruddy lips, so grotesque against the pallor of her cheeks, began to frame a cry.

"Of course you know," and I don't think we've met. It was an edge of irony. A thin white hand with a ring about the wrist stole out from under the fire screen as if for flight. Hagan noted the nervousness of the arm and the gleam of an eye. He saw the gleam of an eye and a dull shimmer of skin and

The groping hand came out and snatched them and left his.

"Guess we'll have a subject, with a bow and a lamp on the table."

Everybody's

He had the shade off and was just lifting a match to the mantle when a sibilant rustling brought his head around with a jerk. A shadowy sprite was bounding for the door. Instantly Hagan dropped the shade and lunged at her. He caught at a hand that was fumbling the lock, roughly whirled the girl about on the axis of her outstretched arm and put his own back against the door.

"No," he denied icily. "We must get better acquainted before you go, and be-

He turned the spring lock so that only the girl could turn it. Then he lit the lamp. That was the end of the sour satire in

disconcertingly steady in their gaze; thinning red hair; his whole personality vital with that air of poised pugnacity that is the heritage of the Celt. Jim Hagan was Chicago Irish and proud of it. Also he was a cracking good newspaper man and proud of that, too.

Hagan spoke. "Now, young lady, if you will make yourself as thoroughly at home as you were before I intruded perhaps we can talk of this and that. I have a feeling we have much to say to each other." He waved to the chair, and as earnest hospitality he poked up the fresh lumps of coal.

Something in his words seemed lost.

this threatening feminine assault upon his sympathies.

"Speak up, fair one! Let Mr. James Hagan, simple American newspaper man, hear all the revolting details."

Her lips trembled, then opened like flood gates to let speech come tumbling out. It was tumultuous, that flood of words. It was assisted by two graphic hands which fluttered like great white moths, now to point to the woe mystery of the night beyond the shaded windows, now to embrace the floor in their sweep. Rapidly and rapidly words crowded on them—her white shoulders lifted in a sudden gesture of appeal, then dropped in distress. She talked desperately, a ache in her eyes.

Hagan understood not a word.

Sense of the strange girl's words carry to the American news-something of the spirit of despair and them bridged the gulf between. In her eyes, in the excited hands and the strain that her voice lay a half-revealed trained news sense; more touch the chivalry that lay in the heart of Jim Hagan. His speculations concerning an explanation of the girl's presence had sped; sympathy and yearning to solve the mystery whose only presence here in his old young thing with a

ed, it sounded. Hagan German. None of the sparkling verb sounds. pawed through the attic memories for his scanty

"*anglais?*"

"*eu,*" replied the girl after a moment of her black brows. At the tenuous bridge being his brain for idiom. picking out scales on something:

"Is your—nation?"

"*eu.*" Then she gave

"*eu.*" Hagan thought the Georgia—huh! dispatches from

the Caucasus recently had told of Bolshevism's red wash sweeping over one of the innumerable little republics spawned by the break-up of imperial Russia. Georgia, yes; somewhere down around Batum where the oil came from. Circassian beauties came, too, from Georgia. Here was one of them, and outside a circus side-show.

A beauty she surely was! Through eddies of pipe smoke—they might have been lazily curling up from braziers of cassia and sandalwood—Hagan let his eyes wander over the cloud of raven hair against the pattern of the chair back, over the blurred mask of tiny features out of which the surprising redness of lips burned so vividly. This *peri*—if that was the right Arabian Nights word for a beautiful maiden summoned out of thin air by rubbing a ring—this *peri* from the burning heart of Russia here in Jim Hagan's chambers after midnight of a night of storm! Why, it just didn't make sense! There must be a catch in it somewhere.

"You—have come here—why?" he managed to achieve. The answer she gave him was in French perhaps bad as his own even though rendered more glibly. Desperately he tried to noose a significant word here and there, but he failed. Russian or French was Greek to him.

To cover his embarrassment he got up and went to the kitchen, returning with a kettle, a tea canister, a wedge of cheddar cheese and muffins. Black eyes followed every move as he snuggled the kettle among the coals to heat, dragged a tea wagon with a broken wheel over to a place beside the girl's chair and disposed on it materials for a snack. The while he talked volubly. He'd have her know that back in Chicago he'd never drunk tea. It was only when he came to London that he'd learned to like the stuff and to eat jam on these do-funny cakes they call muffins. Had she ever eaten pancakes, now? Well, there was a dish for real folks! He'd give a month's salary for a stack of pancakes here in this man's town.

In Hagan's voice hidden laughter always bubbled. It was that quality of robust spirits which now spoke to his *peri* in the Esperanto of youth. Little by little the girl's restraint was dissipated. She forgot, even as had he, the locked door and the hint of blunt force the turning of the key had given. She laughed—a full-throated

contralto laugh—when Hagan abstractedly used a quilted plate-lifter to pick up a cold muffin. When the water was boiling she usurped the duties of brewing and pouring and of spreading the marmalade.

Hagan thought it time for introductions. He bowed low from the hassock where he sat at the flank of the bishop chair, tapped himself solemnly and intoned a single syllable: "Jim."

"Djim," the girl acknowledged with childish gravity. In turn she bobbed her tousled head: "'Nastasia."

He brought out a professional card from his wallet with the number of his Fleet Street office on it and wrote "Jim Hagan" under the superscription. This she tucked into her bodice and after a moment's indecision she stretched out her hand for the pencil. Hagan gave her a fresh card. She rapidly scribbled something. That would be her full name, Hagan guessed. Then the lead tip hung poised, began a line of script, stopped. A swoop carried it back over this second line in heavy marks of erasure. With a shamed little *moue* of red lips the girl handed the card back to Hagan.

The name he had hoped to read was in the Russian script, unintelligible. Below, where afterthought had scored across the beginnings of an address, was the single word, "Hotel."

"Put the rest of it down." Hagan sternly pushed card and pencil into resisting hands. "After to-night I think I have the right to know."

He took her hand, fixed the pencil between her fingers and placed the tip significantly after that word, "Hotel," on the card. But the fingers would not move. Then Hagan, looking up impatiently, saw something to bring him up standing. Gone was the light of mischief from her elfin face. Bleak terror sat in her eyes. Her whole face seemed to have withered and grown haggard under the spell of fear that gripped her. Her French faltered brokenly:

"No—no, monsieur! They—they would—kill!"

KNOCKING at the door became impatient. Hagan was flung into the broad awake with a jerk that racked every sleep-drenched fiber of him; he stumbled to his feet automatically.

Dead coals in the grate; dead light from

the student lamp; through the windows a bleared murk meaning daylight of a sort. And the big wing chair with its chintz vestments dropping to a deep swale—empty! Yes, empty. Gone was the tiny figure in Nile green that should have been embraced by the grandfatherly arms; on the hearth no slippers perched like strange beetles. Why—why, in just the minute he had been dozing—

Bang—bang—bang! A shrill complaint emphasized the blows of knuckles on the oak. Still in a doze Hagan blundered to the door and threw back the catch. In doing so he had a half-prompting that he should have used his key; that he could not have opened the door without his key since he had thrown on the spring latch that minute when a girl—

The charwoman of Lemon Court with a tray stood in the hall. She wore her usual appearance of having just been delivered by a collector of old rags and sacks—dumped at Hagan's door without having been tied into a very neat parcel.

"You're a bit 'ard to knock up this morning, sir," simpered the creature from belowstairs. "I wuz almost minded to report to th' crowner there's a corp for 'im to come an' sit on."

Hagan mumbled something defensively, and while the charwoman spread his breakfast on the table he covertly cast an eye through half-opened doors into the kitchen, into the bedroom. He was sure 'Nastasia must be somewhere in his chambers, and of course while this impossible charwoman was about it would not be at all regular—

"What's the idea—rushing breakfast up here so early?" he growled.

The mistress of the dreadful kipper leered significantly at the American gentleman. "You night workers!" she cackled. "So early—my eyes! 'Asn't the New Temple clock just finished striking noon?"

The harpy was about to withdraw when an idea came to Hagan: "Tell me, Mrs. Sarsford, who occupied these chambers before I moved in three weeks ago?"

"Now, Mr. 'Agan, if that weren't puffily remarkable, you arskin' that question this morning w'en only an hour ago me an' Mr. 'Ackley—which's the day porter at the Fleet Street gate, y'know—was makin' mention of this 'ere same Mr. Popoff you're inquiren' of?"

"Popoff?" Hagan echoed.

"Well, Mr. 'Agan, sir, that's what we calls it, we plain English folks wot carn't twist our tongues round these 'ere foring nymes. It wuz Pop-something—a most ongordly nyme! 'E must 'a' been a Greek or a Eyetalian. But my I myke so bold as to arsk, sir, wot is your interest in this cove Popoff?"

HAGAN ignored the charwoman's question and plumped one of his own at her: "He didn't have a daughter, this Popoff?"

The charwoman swelled visibly; if the American gentleman wanted gossip he had come to the right quarter.

"Well, Mr. 'Agan, sir, none of us folks in Leming Court—us honest folks—myde so bold as to call 'em darters. There's a uglier word nor that which plain-spoken English folks mykes use of, sir. At all hours, Mr. 'Agan! An' foring-looking toffs with whiskers most outlandish 'anging all over their evening wescuts accompanyin' of the same. An' late parties, sir—lawk! With my own 'ands I've swept up so much as a dozing champagne bottles right in this room the morning arter.

"It got so scand'lous, Mr. 'Agan, sir"—the worthy Mrs. Sarsford gave Hagan a whiff of her brandied breath in deepest confidence—"so scand'lous Mr. Tippenny, the wig-myker, mykes the complaint an' the landlord arsk this 'ere Popoff for his keys. But my I myke so bold, Mr. 'Agan, as to arsk—"

"Asked for his keys, eh?" Hagan suddenly interrupted. "Well, did he get them?"

"That 'e did not, sir. Not only did this Popoff willun myke off with some of the landlord's furniture, an' him not giving any of us Leming Court folks so much as a stiver for a tip, but 'e tykes all the keys wiv 'im so's we 'as to get a locksmith up 'ere to myke some more. All foringers—except Amurican gentlemen—are blacklegs, sir. Them keys, now; nobody's been a-tamperin'?"

Hagan answered her burning curiosity with a shilling pressed into her palm, and the loquacious Mrs. Sarsford bowed her way out.

The instant the door clicked behind her Hagan was making a soft-footed tour of his chambers. He hardly dared admit to

himself how deep the disappointment each opened door brought him. Yes, she had fled, this midnight sprite from some pomegranate garden in the Levant, slipped out into the fog while he slept like any long-shoreman, head on arms on the hassock at her feet.

What a goat he'd been! Hagan built up a very unflattering picture of himself—snoring—oh, undoubtedly snoring—while a black-headed witch on tiptoe leaned over him with a pitying smile of farewell. When it happened, this flitting of hers out into the mazes of the fog-choked courts, Hagan could not guess; he prayed it was some time after Fleet Street gate had been opened to the day—some hour when no one of Mrs. Sarsford's nasty ilk would be on duty there to grin knowingly at a little creature wrapped in an evening cloak.

IN AN evening cloak! Another angle of the situation drenched Hagan with chilling possibilities. He visioned the girl 'Nastasia, bareheaded, her silken ankles screaming incongruity below the hem of her mantle—'Nastasia groping her way through the fog to Fleet Street. Street of menace and confusion, with careering buses following nose to tail like shadowy elephants, with drays and newspaper wagons, sidewalks filled with clerks footing it down to Ludgate and the City beyond, with drunken navvies staggering homeward after a night of debauch. On Fleet Street a girl in evening gown and wrap in the morning's ghostly gray—a girl who spoke no English, yet who must find her way to that hotel, presumably somewhere in London, whose name she dared not write down on the card.

The alert mind of the man—his news-trained mind—now fully aroused, set itself to picking up a trail and following a thread of mystery. Already a single ray of light had been let in by the gossiping charwoman; it illumined the sinister figure of a man named Popoff, or Pop-*something*, foreigner, giver of wine parties, squire of women. Popoff, dispossessed of these chambers, now for three weeks the abode of Hagan, had walked off with the keys. 'Nastasia could not have let herself into Hagan's rooms without one of those keys; could not have escaped while Hagan slept without a key to turn the lock he had sprung against her

vain dash for liberty the moment of their first encounter. It was not his key she had used. If not his—whose?

Hagan saw again the leer on the rummy features of the charwoman as she mouthed details of Popoff's revels. For a minute he felt a little sick.

Though the hour demanded Hagan's presence at his office, upon quitting his chambers he turned into the establishment of the wig-maker whom Mrs. Sarsford had cited as the chief protestant against the revels of Popoff. Stephen Tippenny, wig-maker to the barristers of Lincoln's Inn and the Old Temple, carried as a side line to his curled and powdered periwigs, renting agencies for a dozen or more of the chambers in Lemon Court, among them Hagan's. Stephen Tippenny was as dry as the lifeless horsehair he fashioned, as communicative as a Dover oyster.

Though the American drove at his armor of secretiveness from every angle, though he allowed the glimmer of a half-crown to promise reward for information given, Tippenny was canny.

"In point of fact the party you refer to as Popoff carries the name Alexis Popondrov," the wig-maker finally volunteered. "I believe he is a refugee of the old régime from Russia and by his speech I should say he knew more of Oxford than of his native country. Quite English, you know—Oxford English, I may say."

"And do you happen to know where he went after he quit the chambers in Number Forty-six without giving up the keys?" Hagan tried to suppress the eagerness in his voice.

Mr. Tippenny gave him a cold eye over a ringlet of horsehair he was nursing on his finger.

"I assure you I had no interest in any circumstance except that of his giving up his chambers."

Hagan, baffled, went out into Fleet Street and turned down toward his office. What had he to help him in his search for a witch-girl named 'Nastasia? Only this: the name of a Russian roisterer, Alexis Popondrov, and confirmation of the charwoman's salty story. Yes, and the beginnings of light upon the mystery of 'Nastasia's presence in his chambers. Popondrov had quit Lemon Court with a key to the chambers on the third-floor front of Number Forty-six.

Whether 'Nastasia alone let herself into those chambers sometime before Hagan's return the night before or whether another accompanied her there, 'Nastasia possessed the key, else she could not have turned the spring latch and escaped while Hagan dozed. Find Popondrov and he'd discover the girl.

But did he want to discover her now that the day had brought ugly revelations; a girl who for some reason had returned to the scene of recent revels so shocking to the sensibilities of Lemon Court? Again that flicker of ugly surmise which had leaped to the fore the moment he saw a tiny figurine in Nile green buried in the depths of the bishop chair. But only for an instant. Potent to outweigh suspicion was the vision of the little features stamped with terror, echo of words given in halting French: "No—no, monsieur! They would kill!"

In the roar of Fleet Street Jim Hagan dedicated himself to a St. George quest. Somewhere in this mighty whirlpool of life about him he would find and rescue a maiden whose laughter was like the chime of bazaar bells in Novgorod!

The office that afternoon was a torture chamber. Eternal chat-chatter of the news tickers dribbling a Lloyd George speech in Commons was like the boring of a dentist's drill. There was he, chained to cables, bound round with ticker tape, when somewhere beyond his grimy windows and the near-by jungle of chimneypots was a girl with eyes like starlit pools—a girl mightily in need of Jim Hagan.

Twice he had his hand on the telephone to send in a call to a certain private cubicle in Scotland Yard's old pile. In that little cell sat an Irishman who knew much and who was Hagan's friend. A word to this red little ferret and all the devious warrens of London's foreign quarters would be under surveillance. Yet did Hagan hesitate; should the little Irishman of Scotland Yard start inquiries at his behest some subordinate flat-foot might blunder, and the terror that had flamed in 'Nastasia's eyes become a very real thing.

To add to Hagan's misery, the Big Boss over in New York chose this day to roar under a thousand miles of ocean orders which shot the head of the London office off to Edinburgh.

TWO days away from London, and on the second night—or post-midnight, rather—a sore and weary Hagan clumped up Fleet Street with the night's moil of cables behind him. Just as he was passing the Golden Cock with the postern gate to the Old Temple ahead he heard the Cockney whine of a voice lifted in anger. Two figures stood before the gate; in one he recognized the night porter.

"An' I sye agyne, such as you 'as no rights in Leming Court. On your wye afore I calls a bobby to tyke you in charge fer the 'ousebreaker an' scallywag wot you are!" The night porter held his lantern menacingly over a somewhat rumpled shirt bosom; its beam cut into high light a smiling satyr's mouth and pointed chin. Just the hint of a silk hat cocked far back somewhere above.

"You fail to grasp my allusion." The voice of the stranger rippled and purled in the affected Oxford manner. "The line runs something like this: 'I do not like you, Dr. Fell. The reason why I cannot tell.' I mean to say, of course, you are not that Dr. Fell of the classic, though I da' say you and he would hit it off together top-hole. Quite a rotter, this doctor, one gathers from reading about him. Now, fellow, stand aside!"

Hagan, grinning with relish, stepped up to the postern. The night porter, recognizing him, made his appeal for alliance. "Mr. 'Agan, sir, carn't you persuade this himpossible person 'e 'as no rights 'ere—much less to your chambers, which syme 'e was recently dispossessed of an'——"

"My chambers!" A sharp prick of interest was Hagan's. The stranger in evening dress favored him with a drawled, "Really!" followed by a polite swaying.

"Yuss, your chambers, Mr. 'Agan. This person's nyme is Popoff an' 'e——"

"A rose by any other name," murmured the silk-hatted one, "—say Popondrov—is just as sweet." Something hit Hagan's heart a double flick. When he could catch his breath he turned to the night porter.

"Mr. Popondrov is quite right in wanting admittance. He is my guest." One of Popondrov's slim gloved hands made a wave to indicate that was that. He tucked an arm under Hagan's and cut a little dance step through the gate. The night porter could only stare after the two, convinced

that Americans were as bad as any other foringers.

As for Hagan, he kept a tight grip on the arm of Popondrov as if this young man haply flung at him by fate might by some magic dissolve into the shadows of court and alley; a tight grip, too, was essential, for Popondrov's gait was erratic. No less the monologue with which he regaled his guide all the way down the echoing flags and up the two flights of Number Forty-six, Lemon Court. Something about an impudent bobby in Piccadilly; something in French which sounded like a song; Oxford jargon as blank to Hagan as the French. They came up to the door of Hagan's chambers.

"Permit me, old egg!" Popondrov threw back the cape of his Inverness with a flourish and produced a key with which he sketched a weaving pattern all about the keyhole. Second shock for Hagan! This was the key that had last been in possession of 'Nastasia when she turned the spring lock in the dawn three days back. No doubt of it! That meant Popondrov had seen the girl since!

An odd sense of possession seemed to have seized upon Popondrov the instant the door was closed behind them. By some twist of fancy he conceived himself the host of his own quarters and Hagan a friend to be entertained. When the latter had the fire burning and the light on, he found Popondrov rummaging behind glass doors of the highboy for liquor glasses. Two he daintily dusted with a silk handkerchief and set on the table. He filled the glasses from a silver cognac flask.

Hagan drank with him, giving his visitor swift appraisal over the rim of his glass. A youngish fellow, blond as a Fleming; features patrician almost to the point of decadence, with a mouth weak and womanish and eyes wherein no hardihood lurked. A pretty man! How handle such a one? Properly approached, he might reveal what the newspaper correspondent was burning to know; a blunder on Hagan's part and that mysterious terror which had flickered so vividly over 'Nastasia's face might be made a very pressing danger.

Popondrov swallowed another horn of brandy after Hagan affected not to see the proffered glass. This last drink cut the underpinning completely away from the

young man's reason and let it down the ways to oblivion. He began a barbaric song which might have been in the Russian, wavered on his legs for a minute, then dropped like a bundle of wet wash into the big wing chair before the fire. A flute-like snore came thence.

Hagan bent over the recumbent figure and explored the waistcoat pockets. His fingers found the key with which Popondrov had opened the door. Pocketing this, Hagan drew a couch to bar egress through that door and lay down to await the dawn. This second visitor to the rookery chambers was not going to escape as the first one had.

DMITRI ANDREVIEFF, late Admiral in command of the Imperial Russian Black Sea Fleet and more recently darling of all the émigrés of the old régime fleeing their homeland before the Red terror, was having his third and most important conference with a most Exalted Personage in the Government of his Majesty George V. Many reasons of caution prompted that this meeting should not be under the eyes of press and public; one of them was that the Admiral's presence in London was supposed to be strictly incognito; another, equally cogent, was that the big man in his Majesty's Government could scarcely afford to be caught openly trafficking with a representative of the Imperial Russian cause. Even from this short distance of years you and I know that one such minister did get caught in just this situation, with great resultant embarrassment to the whole of his Majesty's Government.

So the meeting between the Russian and the Englishman was held in a white and gold room of a private residence in Kensington—a most discreet residence, whose mistress enjoyed playing politics for the English minister. It was after midnight; the House had just risen from an arduous session devoted to a defense of the Government's military policy in the Archangel sector, and the minister had posted at once to his appointment with Admiral Andreievieff.

A word to photograph the Admiral—no need to court embarrassment by lifting the mask from the English minister. Tall above the average and seeming even taller in his black and white of evening dress

with the glitter of a jeweled star below the bow tie; pallor of features sharply brought out by the well glossed black of a short beard; thin nose of a patrician; tired eyes of a sensualist; hands like a woman's—Dmitri Andrevieff was pure type of a race now scattered and brought to the husks of degradation after centuries of privilege.

How the Admiral of the Black Sea Fleet escaped shooting by his own revolting sailors is no part of this story. How he managed to become the darling of the French Bourse—desperately avid of pulling something from the wreck of Russian bonds—and of the British military caste—as *Junker* as Ludendorff—can be dismissed with the simple statement that he did so contrive and succeed. To-night he stood as the first of a succession of adventurers to follow; men who tried to piece together a house for privilege in Russia from the dust of the explosion.

The representative of his Majesty's Government quaffed a ceremonial highball and then proceeded with British directness to the business of the evening.

"Your Excellency, you are quite sure your presence in London has been well guarded—no agents of the Soviet to nose you out and carry the news to the extreme right of our Laborites? Wretched beggars! They and their radical papers are giving us a fine harrying over our expeditionary forces in Archangel."

The Russian spread fine hands. "Positively incognito, my dear sir. Until the first of my meetings with you my whole liaison with the big people of your Government was maintained by young Popondrov, my very competent aide. He is more English than an Englishman. No agent of the Bolsheviks in London would recognize an imperialist in him. As for myself, I have scarcely left my hotel."

"Right!" The Englishman vented gusty relief. "Under cover is the word, my dear Admiral. You may well appreciate that with the attitude of Labor what it is—the secret sympathies of its extremists for the Soviet and all that—the Gov—those who are in accord with your aspirations, I mean to say, must move with extreme caution. Now to come down to concrete things, the War Office——"

The Exalted Personage moved a heavy brief case onto the table, brought there-

from thick canvas-backed sheets which unfolded into military maps of Siberia, of the Caucasus and frozen wastes of Archangel. All these maps were scored across with heavy red lines—hypothetical armies of liberation converging upon Moscow to crush the life out of a new monster in the world called the Soviet. More documents from the brief case; lists of international bankers who either might be or already had been cajoled into minting reluctant francs and guineas into machine guns, airplanes, barbed wire, steel-jacketed bullets.

Dmitri Andrevieff, one-time patrician idler, now turned adventurer for high stakes, was beguiled by a dream picture woven about the glorified figure of Dmitri Andrevieff, deliverer. The one-time commander of a fleet under the blue cross of St. Michael, who knew more about the personnel of the Imperial Ballet at Petrograd than he did of maneuvers in echelon, fancied himself already secure in the saddle of a dictator.

In many ways the ex-Admiral was wrong; particularly in his confidently voiced assurance of his incognito in London. For when his Majesty's minister finally left the house in Kensington and Andrevieff followed through the door to his own limousine a few minutes after, patient eyes witnessed the circumstance from the thorny depths of a hedge across the road. No patience is comparable to the Russian's. Since Andrevieff debarked from a British destroyer at Folkestone and motored up to London a month prior to this night of meeting, squads and platoons of patient eyes had marked his every move. His incognito was as complete as that of Billy Sunday.

CHANCE had it that the night of Andrevieff's secret meeting with an important arm of the government was the same that witnessed the beginnings of embarrassment for his aide, Alexis Popondrov, gentleman reveler. For while two men in a discreet white and gold room in Kensington were advancing red lines of armies over far-flung Russia young Popondrov was sleeping off his indiscretions behind the locked door of Jim Hagan's chambers over Lemon Court. It was the American newspaper man who was biding his time in the matter of supplying embarrassment for his self-invited guest. Determined was Hagan that this blond and ladylike young Russian

would not see out-of-doors until he had revealed all he knew about the girl named 'Nastasia.

When the blear eye of morning looked through the windows, Hagan roused himself from his fitful doze at guard before the door and made shift to brew tea and toast muffins for himself and the flute-like snorer in the wing chair. Preparations finished, he awoke Popondrov without ceremony. The disheveled young man whimpered fretfully to be let alone; but Hagan was inexorable, even to the point of dragging the dandy to a bowl and dousing cold water over his head.

"Now we'll have a little tea and a lot of talk," he announced as a rumpled head lifted above the towel.

Popondrov gave his tormentor an unrecognizing stare but appeared to take it as no great matter that he awoke to find himself with a strange companion.

"My name's Hagan," the newspaper man announced as he passed a cup of tea. "These are my chambers. You let yourself into them last night with a key from your own pocket."

"Quite so!" murmured Popondrov and sipped the tea with relish.

His cool acceptance of an anomalous situation angered the American who, thoroughly aroused, broke out in good Chicagoese:

"Come, now, cut out the up-stage stuff! Technically you are a house-breaker. It's not up to you to put on any frills. I want to know a few things from you. One of them is, how do you come to have a key to my chambers—and use it?"

"You are making a wretched ass of yourself, if I may be permitted the comment," was Popondrov's drawled reply. "Perhaps a mere matter of forgetfulness on my part—a fancy, let us say, born of conviviality, prompted me to return to the old home nest. I lived here once, you know."

He set down his cup with great dignity, arose, dusted a crumb from the knee of his trousers, gathered his topper and cape from a near-by chair and stalked to the door. Hagan watched him with a sardonic eye as he attempted to turn the spring latch to open it.

"What's your rush?" he purred. "It's locked, you see. Locked it last night with the key from your pocket."

"What a rotter!" Popondrov sniffed.

"Do you want me to raise a row and have a bobby in here?"

"Do *you* want to do that?" was Hagan's counter. "Why, man, a cop is the last person you want to see."

With a rush Hagan suddenly changed his tactics: "Why not sit down here quietly, finish your tea and tell me all about 'Nastasia?"

The name 'Nastasia dropped like a shrapnel-burst upon the Russian. He whirled from the door and in two strides was back and glowering down into Hagan's impudently smiling features.

"Where did you get that name? What does it mean to you?" The queries were shot between tensed lips. Gone now was all the man's assumption of foppish displeasure, his Oxford pose; sincerity spoke from his eyes. Hagan, quick to realize his advantage, sparred for time to learn how best to use it.

"What does that name mean to me?" he echoed. "Well, a girl in a green dress and with bare legs; a girl whose eyes are black as the blackest in Gruzia and with lips like——"

"Gruzia, you say! 'Nastasia—'tis shel!" Popondrov babbled. "Tell me, man, where did you last see her?"

"In that very chair where you spent part of last night." Hagan drove home his answer cruelly. "She was bare-legged because her stockings were drying on the fire screen, you see. And she was laughing and drinking tea—with me."

HAGAN'S head jerked aside just in time to miss the smash of a fist. As he slipped sideways from his chair he caught the toppling body of the Russian following the spent blow and spilled it into the depths of the wing chair.

"Don't be an idiot!" Hagan snapped. "Who should know better than you that 'Nastasia was here three nights ago? It was the key you have that let her in, wasn't it? You brought her here, didn't you?"

The head of the blond young man in the bishop chair wagged dazedly. Tears of womanish weakness stood in his eyes.

"I bring her here? 'Nastasia, one girl in a thousand, here to this wretched place, and at night? Be careful what you say! I have not seen 'Nastasia for a fortnight.

She has disappeared—been swallowed up! I have searched. I have eaten out my heart. Last night—my grief—I had to forget all!”

Popondrov suddenly heaved up from the chair and faced Hagan menacingly. “I say now, what have you done with the girl? Where did you hide her that night you say she was here? Why did she come here, and with whom? Come—come, my man; you cannot trifle with me!”

THE American read a little scornfully the bristling menace in the Russian exquisite’s mien, yet was he convinced of the young man’s sincerity. No play-acting there. Why not try a little himself, Hagan thought.

“See here, Mr. Popondrov, you are in no position to play the heroic defender of defenseless womanhood. No, not with your record established while you were occupying these chambers. I’ve taken the opportunity to look up that record, and it’s not chemically pure. What’s more”—this was a shot into the dark—“I gather from what Miss 'Nastasia said that she hasn’t the greatest confidence in the world to impose in you.”

The blond young man threw an arm over his eyes and moaned. “My habits! The dear girl does not know my drinking is in line with my duty. We expatriates from Russia, it is necessary we come together often, and when we do the old Russian custom—” His unfinished sentence told much.

“Sit down, Mr. Popondrov, and listen to all I know about a mysterious beauty named 'Nastasia.” Hagan’s nimble wits had taken the other’s full measure and come to a decision: Here was some one who could be made an ally in the search for a peri from Georgia—perhaps not a very competent ally but better than none. Better play the cards to the end that Popondrov’s confidence be gained, then use him, so long as that use achieved something. Hagan began measuredly:

“I never saw Miss 'Nastasia until sometime around two o’clock three mornings ago. I have not seen her since. I am an American correspondent over here and my business is to get news. There’s a whale of a story woven about this girl 'Nastasia—I can feel it!—and I am after that story.

Incidentally, I hope to help a young lady out of danger. Now——”

He proceeded with the whole story. He showed the Russian the card whereon she had scribbled her name and the unfinished address. Popondrov listened breathlessly. The card with the Russian script on its face he pressed dramatically to his lips.

“There you are!” Hagan finished. “Now here’s a question: Who are the people who 'Nastasia says would kill her if she revealed where she is living? And why? What is the terror hanging over her?”

“Her uncle is a devil!” Popondrov exploded. “Smirnoff, who taught her to dance, first in Odessa and then in the ballet at Moscow; he’s a red fiend from the Pit!”

“But,” Hagan objected, “'Nastasia used the word ‘they.’ ‘They would kill me,’ was the way she put it. There must be more than one she is afraid of.”

Popondrov sat with his eyes on the fire for a long minute as if weighing a decision. Then he turned to Hagan.

“Sir, you have been fair with me; I can but repay with equal fairness. Listen:

“'Nastasia is a gently born girl of Gruzia, or Georgia, as the English has it. Her father, a colonel of artillery in the old army, was killed at Tannenberg in 1914. The mother was destitute. 'Nastasia was put under the charge of her uncle, Smirnoff, who had the school of the dance at Odessa. I first saw her in the ballet at Moscow during the Kerensky revolution—my regiment had fallen apart in the troubled times and I was planning to return to England, which I love.

“Sir, I was mad when I saw 'Nastasia dance. Just to be near one who had bewitched me! And my queen was so cruel to me! Without her, life was not worth living, yet I could not have her. Then came the Soviet—and terror.”

Hagan heard a tale now common to the world; one little recitative in the great tragic epic of the Flight from Russia. How this blond dandy had fended for a dancing girl and her mother; how death overtook the mother in the night and, with a seaport and safety in sight, guns of mad peasants had separated the champion from his charge. Imprisonment for Popondrov, sentence of death, escape. In Naples one fleeting glimpse of his divinity under jealous charge

of the uncle, Smirnoff. Another glimpse and a hastily exchanged word in Paris.

"And so, sir, I found her in London just a month ago. I saw her face in the window of a wretched hotel in Chelsea—it was a chance given of God!—and thus we met, that devil Smirnoff all smiles of welcome for me. From her I heard the story of her escape from Russia after being parted from me; it was this man Smirnoff who wrought it; he had some influence with the Commissariat of Justice.

"Of our meetings from that time up to a fortnight ago I need tell you only this: 'Nastasia was changed. She suffered under a terrible dread which her lips refused to reveal, no matter how I pleaded to be told. Then one day I went to the hotel where they lived and found them gone. The brutish Belgian who was manager there professed to know nothing of their whereabouts or why they had moved. Since that day I have raged over half of London to no purpose."

With a fierce access of anger he suddenly blurted: "I'll tell you why 'Nastasia lives under the terror. That Uncle Smirnoff, that red-headed dog of hell, he's gone bad—Bolshevik! Else he and 'Nastasia never could have left Odessa alive."

Hagan turned over in his mind the dramatic episodes of the Terror he had listened to, young Popondrov's confession of a fair, clean passion—all the more surprising in contrast with the report of a rake's dissipation that had attached to his name in Lemon Court. In the light of these revelations the shadowy and unsubstantial figure of a midnight visitor to these chambers—a barefoot sprite who spread a web of romance over the place for a magical hour and then was gone—this gossamer shape began to take form and substance. He saw 'Nastasia as a creature of flesh and blood, something that could warm to the glow of love, be subject to the ardors of a lover. More than that, he caught a glimpse of the girl's present plight—an outcast under cruel dominion of some inhuman guardian who would not hesitate to take a whip to her.

With this filling in of the picture Hagan had carried behind his eyes these past days, all the more did the girl with the laughter of deep bells become desirable. He must find her! But Popondrov?

WITH the cool self-assurance of his breed Hagan made a quick resolution that if the young Russian was to be treated in the light of a rival that circumstance would but give zest to the search for the lost 'Nastasia.

Hagan took up the other's story after the cross-questioning manner of the newspaper man.

"You say you think this Uncle Smirnoff has turned Bolshevik. What is he doing in London, then?"

"Watching us, the émigrés of the old régime, I haven't a doubt," was Popondrov's ready answer; "plotting with the Reds in Britain to spread Sovietism; acting as agent of Moscow to report any moves at counter-revolution that might originate here."

"Another question"—Hagan's quick intelligence was picking up all the loose ends of the other's narrative. "You walked away from Lemon Court a couple of weeks ago with the key to the door—probably just an oversight; but did you give the key to 'Nastasia?"

Popondrov flushed angrily. "Decidedly not! I tell you, sir, if 'Nastasia let herself out of this room with a key to the spring lock on that door, it was not my key."

"Whose was it if not yours—the one you took with you when you gave up these chambers?"

"I cannot answer that question." The blond head was shaken dazedly. "I saw 'Nastasia just once after I quit these chambers. While I was with her I happened to discover I'd gone off with the key—found it in the pocket of my greatcoat. She was a little distressed with me—thought that wretched key but another evidence of my—my forgetfulness, shall I say? I promised to return it immediately and never gave it another thought."

"You don't think the girl could have taken the key without your knowledge?"

"See here!" Again the Russian flared up, but Hagan stopped him with an abrupt gesture.

"If we're to get anywhere in this business you must take my questions as they're meant. Granted, 'Nastasia did not take the key; was that uncle of hers present when you discovered it in your overcoat?"

Popondrov tried to concentrate. "Ye-es, I believe he was. We were all three in

that wretched hotel room of theirs and——”

“Good! Now we’re getting somewhere,” was Hagan’s interruption. “Did Uncle Smirnoff know you had been living in Lemon Court?”

“Yes. Foolishly I told him.”

“Then he heard you explain to 'Nastasia that you had quit these chambers, and inadvertently carried away the key?”

“Why—why— By Jove, now I have it! No; that wretched Smirnoff came into the room only after I had explained to 'Nastasia. He saw the key in my hand and made a nasty innuendo. But I do not get the point of all these questions. Why——”

“Don’t you see, man! Now we know why 'Nastasia was here before my fire at two o’clock in the morning. That precious uncle of hers stole your key that day when you last saw the girl. Then he and 'Nastasia disappeared. He believed you were still living in Lemon Court. For some devilish reason we can’t guess he decided he would throw 'Nastasia at you out of the dark, and three nights ago he brought her here and forced her to await your coming alone here in these chambers. Don’t you see?”

The pale features against the chair back were knotted in an effort to follow a tangled thread. “But 'Nastasia knew all the time I was no longer here,” Popondrov finally objected.

“Surely,” Hagan agreed. “That makes the girl all the more a wonder. Perhaps to protect you—to keep Smirnoff from knowing you could not be made a tool for some Red plot of his, she came to this old jungle of ruins in the night, in the storm. Get the picture, Popondrov! That little girl, knowing not a word of English, allowing herself to play bait for a trap—waiting here in strange chambers for a man she’d never seen to come in and find her——

“Oh, man, you said it; one woman in a thousand—in ten thousand!”

ON THE bend of Green Arbor Walk, where it turns just beyond the abandoned Empress Theater to plunge under the arches of Chelsea Bridge, stands the Hôtel de Flandres, a three-story rookery favored by foreigners who for one reason or another do not care to advertise their presence in London. Its proprietor was a Fleming who had narrowly escaped hanging

as a spy during the war and was happy still to be having the use of his neck even in such dreary surroundings as those of the Walk. Several of the guests under the Fleming’s sagging roof were destined to hang sometime, yet during the commutation of their fate they were unobtrusive, soft-footed, seeking only to avoid crossing tangent to the affairs of all men.

Not so with Uncle Smirnoff, who occupied one of the second floor front rooms. The red man, far from retiring from a risky world, was avid of driving a pin into the world’s soft flank. He wished to keep in touch with the world, or that part of it which chiefly concerned him, and by his own devious measures he did so. By an artless arrangement of mirrors, taking advantage of the curve in Green Arbor Walk whereon the hotel stood, Uncle Smirnoff could sit in his stocking feet well away from the window and scan the face and figure of every passer-by on either sidewalk. This mechanical aid to anticipating the visit of a friend or evading a call from one who might not be friendly pleased Uncle Smirnoff mightily.

For during long days the man with the flame head rarely stirred outside the odorous walls of the Hôtel de Flandres, however wide might be his night range.

And in an adjoining room, a frowsy, fusty chamber smelling of mold under the carpet and onions below-stairs, the girl 'Nastasia spent the days and the nights a prisoner under key. A prisoner she had been since that dripping morning she returned afoot with her mantle reeking moisture to confess to her uncle that the man she had waited to find in Lemon Court was not Popondrov but a stranger—under cross questioning and pinching fingers on her arm 'Nastasia had admitted, too, her knowledge before the fact of the fruitlessness of her enforced visit to the Old Temple. The terrors of her escape from the Temple, her clambering over an iron fence bounding the gardens on the Embankment side and that long, long journey afoot down the Embankment to Chelsea Bridge under the questioning eyes of policemen and early-morning market carters: these nightmare memories disturbed the girl’s solitude.

But one solace was hers. Waking and sleeping she kept in her bosom a bit of pasteboard with English script across its

face and underneath this a bold scrawl, "Jim Hagan." Countless were the times when 'Nastasia brought this card from its hiding-place to study again what was written there. For by doing so she could conjecture the better the bold features, the sound of an alien voice with hidden laughter in it. Occasionally the prisoner of Uncle Smirnoff would range beside the face of this gallant unknown the lineaments of Popondrov, assiduous lover and once savior of her life. Then would the girl contrast lines of weakness and sensuality with the bold hardihood of blue eyes and a self-assurance registered in mouth and chin:

This setting of one against the other of two men, one well known and greatly her creditor in terms of service, the other but the dominant figure in a dream experience, always left the girl behind the locked door of the Hôtel de Flandres distraught, filled with self-reproach. Great was her debt to a Russian exquisite named Popondrov, but greater the tug of her heart toward one Jim Hagan, a man who could be so gentle under the strange circumstances of a first meeting.

As for more immediate circumstances of her life—that terrible rehearsal in the dark theater, followed by the sally in the storm to a strange room and now imprisonment: these things were tabs to an unsolved riddle. 'Nastasia, alone in a strange city, helpless under the tyranny of Uncle Smirnoff, guessed vaguely she was a pawn to be pushed onto the chessboard of weighty events. But when and in what manner, she could not venture a hazard.

Deep in her heart she nursed a hope, absolutely groundless. It was that before the supreme trial was hers, the man Jim Hagan would come to snatch her away.

A week had passed since that night of her encounter with Hagan—a dreadful week in the miasma of the rookery on the Walk—when 'Nastasia learned something of what the future held. It was near midnight. She was in her bed but not asleep when the key turned in the door and candle-light showed the circlet of flame about the face of her uncle.

"Quick, little she-calf! Dress and come into my room. You are wanted."

TREMBLING, 'Nastasia hurried into some clothes and with her hair still tumbled from the pillow she joined the waiting Smirnoff in the hall. He preceded

her into his room, before the window of which a blanket had been nailed to insure against spying from across the street. The single gas jet was but a pale shell in a sea of tobacco smoke. Three men were there, the same—though 'Nastasia could not know this—who had been spectators of her dance in the Empress Theater. At sight of them the girl shrank back against the door. Smirnoff had his back against it and was grinning over his beard.

"Brothers, this little minnow for our sturgeon trap," he announced. Three pairs of eyes roved impudently over her little figure. Smirnoff turned to a sallow man who was roosting on the bed:

"Andres, you tell her. I have not the heart." This with a righteous smirk.

The fellow called Andres spit upon the tip of his cigarette and ground the stub into the carpet. "You have heard of Admiral Andrevieff?" he demanded.

'Nastasia nodded dazedly.

"You know he is an enemy of the Soviet in Moscow?"

The girl denied by a shake of her head.

"Such he is, and he is now in London conferring with the money lords to prepare a counter-revolution in Russia—a foreign-financed uprising of the few bourgeoisie who have not yet starved; folk like your sweet self, little dove."

'Nastasia, in whose crowded life of the past year there had been no room for knowledge of politics or intrigue within or without the bloody machine which had snatched at her fleeing skirts, wondered dully what might be coming.

"This Andrevieff must be destroyed before he quits London," the spokesman continued. "And your good Uncle Smirnoff agrees with us three that you are the one to do the destroying."

"No! No!" 'Nastasia's cry was that of a frightened child in the dark.

"But yes! Yes!" her torturer insisted imperturbably. "The good God has given you trim legs to dance with, a pretty face to snare such dogs as Andrevieff. He'd sell all Russia for a pair of pretty legs and a pretty face."

The sallow face thrust itself out to leer at her. "Why do you think Uncle Smirnoff invited us to watch you dance in that home of cobwebs if it was not that we should judge of your legs and your face? You are

the one Russian in the world who can get near enough to this Andrevieff to sink a knife in his heart. He'll come to you, arms open!"

'Nastasia, sick with horror, turned to break for the door. Smirnoff, standing there, pushed her back with fat hands. "Gently—gently, little child of a swine father!"

"So now it has all been arranged," came a droning voice through the tobacco haze. "One of our brave women—a clever wretch!—who was spy for Germany in high society here before the Armistice and now is spying for the Soviet, she has arranged a quiet entertainment at her home in St. John's Wood. She has discovered you, my dear, a great Russian dancer in hiding here through fear of the dreadful Soviet; so she gives this little entertainment, very select, for the Admiral and a few English guests. And there you dance before Andrevieff tomorrow night as you danced before us. Do you hear! Wildly—with abandon. You offer him the sweets of youth—all! He will arrange to take these things. Then—this!"

The sallow-faced man lifted one trouser leg and from the top of a concealed boot he drew out a knife with a blade scarcely wider than a shoemaker's awl.

THE days of 'Nastasia's imprisonment in a charnel room on the Walk had been days of feverish energy for Jim Hagan: at least those following his conversation with Popondrov in the small hours at Lemon Court. They had parted, these oddly matched champions, under promise of Hagan to report to the Russian in his new lodgings on Jeremy Street whatever progress he might make in his search for a hidden girl. Then the American newspaper man commenced his burrowing into the dark.

All he had to begin work on was the name and address of the cheap hotel in Chelsea where Popondrov had discovered his sweetheart and whence Uncle Smirnoff had removed her "without trace." Just that and unflagging patience. The method of his beginning was the same which in his younger days had won Hagan advancement in Chicago newspaperdom. This was to seize upon any possible circumstance promising ever so vaguely to strike tangent to the unknown and with infinite patience to work down that tangent.

Wherefore the morning whose earlier hours had seen Hagan and a suddenly sobered Popondrov exchanging confidences, later witnessed the former speeding by taxi along the Embankment, past Westminster and into the dreary borough of Chelsea. He dismissed his car a few minutes' walk from the expected destination and proceeded on foot to a seedy-looking hotel in a backwater off King's Road. In a gas-lit cubby marked "Office" he encountered a man with a sheep's forehead and shifty eyes who professed a scanty knowledge of English under questioning.

Did he know a Russian named Smirnoff? *Mais non.*

But Smirnoff was a guest there, was he not? Subtle craft of Hagan's to draw a denial which would admit the man had once been under the roof. The Belgian spread his hands in profession of ignorance. Hagan, quick to take the measure of a stupid craft he had to deal with, decided upon a trick which he would not have dared try upon an Englishman. He loosed the top buttons of his waistcoat and turned back one hem to show a badge pinned in the lining: a gold and glittering emblem of police authority—in Chicago. A grateful department in the city by the lake once had bestowed this honor to signalize Hagan's saving a police squad from death by a bomb.

The pale eyes of the man behind the desk flickered apprehensively at sight of the badge. Instantly his demeanor changed. Marvelously his English improved. Yes—yes; now he did recollect a guest named Smirnoff—a man with red hair all over his face—beautiful daughter with him. But—he consulted the register—they had quit the hotel two weeks ago.

"Where did they go?" Hagan demanded.

"Alas, monsieur, I know not. On my honor!"

Hagan gave the nervous manager a long look. "Letters!" he snapped. "Smirnoff left some forwarding address."

"Of a surety not. The Russian paid his bill—vanished."

"How did his baggage go out? Did he have a van from the neighborhood carry it away?" Hagan was playing the part the other invested him with for all the kudos there was in it.

The Belgian made a terrific effort to



A muffled shriek. Hagan reared back. He shot a quick look into the chair and saw—two eyes wide in terror! Almost like the eyes of an animal caught in a trap.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

55

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remember. His best was that Smirnoff had summoned a four-wheeler from a cabstand on King's Road, and his trunk had gone off on the driver's seat with himself and his so-beautiful daughter. Yes, he could show the gentleman from Scotland Yard where the cabstand was; but by the Mother of All Mercies, he could not point out the veritable cabman who had taken Smirnoff away. His only recollection of the cabman was that he was drunk when he came for his fares.

HIS business at the cabstand drew upon all of Hagan's finesse. He knew that of all the unlicked churls in the world the London cabman is king. He picked out the churliest Bill Sykes of the lot of waiting ruffians and gave him a hypothetical address in Holborn where he wanted to be taken. Then, as if in afterthought: "'Tis a long, dry ride, Bill. How about a pot of 'arf-an' before we start?'"

A reciprocal gleam in bloated eyes answered the invitation, and Hagan led the way to a near-by pub. After three mugs of varnish-colored liquid had disappeared down the cabby's gullet Hagan plumped his little fairy tale. He was a solicitor's clerk come all the way from New York to find a red-headed man whose testimony could clear up the disposition of an estate worth £50,000. He'd traced him right up to this King's Road cabstand and there the trail ended. Rotten luck—what!

Now if he could only find the cabby from this stand who on such and such a night had been summoned to take this red-headed man and his beautiful daughter from the Hôtel Anvers to other lodgings, why, there'd be a bit o' plush in it for all hands round.

A rheumy eye fell upon the large silver coin a hand carelessly spun on the bar. Here was a real toff, even though his speech betrayed him as Amurican. The cabby lumbered to the pub's door.

"Yeu, 'Orace—'Umpy—Skivvers, pad the 'oof 'ere an' look lively! 'Ere's a toff to stand drinks an' arsk questions."

Inside of a minute the cabstand was deserted and five mugs went under the barmaid's tap handles. The Amurican toff did himself proud. He didn't ask a question until the tap had worked again.

Upshot of ten minutes' maundering and quarreling was that 'Umpy remembered as

how Lumpy-Jawr 'Ighston said a for'night ago he'd given Beauty and the Beast out of the Covent Garden Pantomime a ride into Pimlico; man all afire with red whiskers; girl scairt-like but a ravin' whinner fer looks. Hagan's ears pricked.

"And where can I find this Highston? Is he on your stand now?"

"That 'e's not," growled the leader of the 'arf-an'-'arf addicts. "'E's in 'Olborn jail 'long of scarfin' up 'is old woman wiv a chair. She's like to die, they says."

Hagan's heart sank. The one man in London who could lead him to 'Nastasia, in jail under a possible charge of homicide! Oh, the devious track he must follow!

He dropped a half-crown on the bar to round out the cabbies' morning and hurried out to catch a bus bound for Fleet Street and his office. Back he must go to have his hands tied with cable slips and ticker tape; to get from Vienna and Danzig and Berlin silly chatter of the world's distress. 'This when his feet were fairly set on a trail which, albeit by twists and turns, must surely lead to 'Nastasia.

Nothing in life was more to be desired; that Hagan knew in his heart. The romantic background behind a black head had snared the Irish heart of the man even as the haunting fear in deep eyes had added a delicious sympathy to the touch of love. That harm threatened—might even now be working torture on 'Nastasia—made every delay in his efforts to reach her side maddening.

Yet four thousand miles away breakfast papers must be waiting to be laid against egg cups that John Smith in Zanesville and Thomas Jones of Little Rock might hear what Jim Hagan had to tell them while coffee cooled by their elbows.

TO INTRODUCE a new character of any major importance into this story at its present stage of development would be indefensible infraction of the somewhat rigid rules of tale-writing. It is no part of my intention to overload the stage with a new twelfth-hour actor; but may I be permitted a digression touching upon so characterless a thing as a window—a plain four-pane window, and dirty to boot?

This window was in Green Arbor Walk; in point of fact it was one of the lights of a second floor directly across the dingy street

from the Hôtel de Flandres and the room wherein 'Nastasia was kept prisoner. Surely nothing distinguishing about this window. Like its three fellows on the second floor front, its dull eyes were veiled from within by flimsy curtains of scrim; one in the Hôtel de Flandres opposite could look ever so intently at this and see nothing an inch behind the panes unless a light flared up at night in the rooms to which they pertained. The window I have chosen to describe never was so lighted; its tenant either never went to bed or, if he did, preferred to do so in the dark.

Now for days and days after the hasty removal from the hotel in Chelsea to this noisome hostelry in the Walk 'Nastasia had furtively watched all the windows in the house across the street. Particularly had she done so after Uncle Smirnoff had turned the key upon her following her deception practiced upon him in the matter of the sally into Lemon Court. Studying the windows of houses opposite might have been one of the few diversions permitted the girl by her lonely and prescribed life in a strange city. Even while they were residents of a front room in the dubious Hôtel Anvers, in Chelsea, 'Nastasia had indulged this harmless pastime.

Parenthetically, Uncle Smirnoff was so canny a man that when he made his niece a prisoner he drove heavy nails into the sashes of the single window giving light to her wretched cell to prevent their being opened. He even saw to it that no pen, pencil or paper remained in 'Nastasia's room wherewith she could write a note to be smuggled surreptitiously out from under his watchful eyes. His caution stopped just short of boarding up the window itself.

It was early morning following the night when 'Nastasia had been brought face to face with the three unlovely conspirators and been told she must assassinate Admiral Andrevieff. The girl was frantic with fear, for in blunt words she had been told her failure to carry out the will of her masters would mean her own death. The night when she should dance before Andrevieff and lure him within reach of a dagger stroke was now less than ten hours away.

For the twentieth time since daylight 'Nastasia threw herself into a chair before the window and let her eyes range over the grimy batteries of glass across the way.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

She started and a hand went swiftly to her lips to stop a gasp.

A pot of pink geraniums stood on the window sill of the second of the four windows directly over the way and fairly opposite her own. Masking curtains dropped behind the blossoms.

During all the time of her stay in the Hôtel Anvers a pot of pink geraniums had graced the sill of a window opposite.

'Nastasia stood up, pulling aside the dirty curtains which screened her window, and gazed as if absorbed, not at the bit of fresh color at her level in the opposite window but down in the street.

The pot of pink geraniums moved—with no hand visible—from one end of the window sill to the other. 'Nastasia caught the movement out of the tail of her eye and nodded her head just perceptibly. Then she hurried to her closet and snatched up a black skirt. She seated herself close to her window with a drawn-back curtain concealing her face and the skirt propped high on her knee. Against this background of dead black one slim hand moved for a pink geranium to see.

It traced capital letters, very slowly, very meticulously—letters with a sweep of line a foot long. First a *C*; then a large *E*; double twist of an *S*; a stroke of one slim finger down with a cross-stroke for a *T*.

In French a message to the pink geranium began to be spelled out: "It is arranged. To-night at ten. At home of——"

A key rattled in the lock. 'Nastasia's tracing hand dropped. Uncle Smirnoff bustled in to find his niece stitching a tear in a black skirt.

"Aha, my pet! Preparing grave clothes for your own sweet self, I see. Make them roomy, little dumb sheep—roomy. For when they find you in the Thames you will have grown."

'Nastasia looked up at the grinning face, flame-wreathed, with a clear gaze. "You will have no need to cast me in the Thames," she said. "I shall kill Andrevieff to-night."

ROUND smears of light punched holes through the creeping night fog in the circle of Piccadilly when Jim Hagan stepped out of a taxi into the near-by lane called Jeremy Street. The hour was near eight when all the night world of London is astream theater-ward.

The newspaper man was admitted to Popondrov's rooms. Restlessly he paced before the fire, waiting the coming of the Russian, who was in his bath. After an eternity of ten minutes the blond young man came striding in, wrapped about in a bathrobe of dizzy Persian design.

"A thousand pardons, dear fellow! I am frightfully late. But tell me! What news?"

"I've found out where 'Nastasia lives and I'm on my way down there now to see her."

"No, man, you don't say!" Popondrov's face was alight with joy which was speedily clouded over by an afterthought. "But, hang it all—my chief—a very imperative engagement—late in keeping it already, you see. I simply can't go with you."

"Your chief?" Hagan's news instinct, which was a sixth sense, pushed to the surface for the instant. He had not attributed any responsibility whatever to Popondrov—no subordination to a superior.

"The Admiral—I mean to say, a certain very good friend absolutely expects me to accompany him to a function to-night." The man's confusion was manifest. "You must know, dear fellow, nothing but positive orders would keep me from going with you to 'Nastasia. But, I say, pop into my dressing-room and tell me all about it while I dive into my clothes."

Hagan suffered no disappointment over the other's inability to go with him to the address he had obtained not two hours before. He would greatly have preferred playing his lone hand to the end; only his pledged word to Popondrov the morning of the exchange of confidences in Lemon Court that he would report any news of the girl's discovery had brought Hagan here. Yes, and one other circumstance which had baffled him beyond measure; there was just a chance the Russian could throw light upon a fresh cross-current of mystery.

While the dandy fussed at studs and softly swore at the intricacies of settling a dress tie in its place, Hagan detailed for him the steps of his search which now, after the third day, gave promise of reward. He came to the circumstance of the imprisoned cabby, Highston.

"When I finally managed to see Highston two hours ago," Hagan burst out, "the man at first wouldn't talk. Said somebody else had come to him in jail only yesterday asking the same questions about the trip

he took with fares from the Hôtel Anvers. Somebody else, mind you! Now what do you make of that?"

Popondrov's head came around with a jerk. Blank surprise was written on his face. "Why—why, who could be doing that? I don't believe anybody in England aside from myself—and you, of course—knows 'Nastasia. Somebody from Russia who knew her there—no, that is unbelievable; her friends there are all dead.

"Er—do you think it's possible Scotland Yard may have got wind of Smirnoff and—"

"I have a friend there," Hagan interrupted. "Just came from an interview with him. He denies any knowledge; and he would give me the straight of it if he knew."

"What then?" Popondrov's far from nimble imagination was leaning heavily on Hagan's.

"Just this possibility left," was the American's surmise; "Smirnoff may be suspected by the head guns of the Soviet back in Moscow, if he is the Bolshevik agent you credit him with being, and they have set trailers to check up on him."

He arose to go. Now that Popondrov could give him no clue to the mystery of the crossed trail of search, Hagan's impatience to push it to the end was mounting. "I'll hop down to the Hôtel de Flandres," he said, "and look over the ground. If things are right I'll take the girl away. I think I can handle any situation that bobs up."

"TAKE 'Nastasia away!" Evidently this highly essential corollary to the achievement of finding 'Nastasia had not yet engaged Popondrov's speculation. "But, man, where will you take her?"

"I'll tell you that after I've done it," was Hagan's farewell, and in less than a minute he was in his taxi, leaving a very distraught lover behind him.

The fog closed down tighter as he was carried deeper into a strange wilderness bound for the address in Pimlico which a near-murderer had given him.

His machine gained the twisted byways of Pimlico, and the driver with muttered curses stopped now and again to turn his spotlight on a street sign. Groping thus, they came to Green Arbor Walk. The taxi was slowly following one curb line when two eyes of light suddenly winked out of the fog ahead. With a grind of

brakes the two cars halted, fenders touching. Their drivers searched vocabularies for words to frame their feelings. By a trick of chance the spotlight on Hagan's car, left glowing from the last street sign inspection, fell full into the black cavern of the other tonneau.

It showed the face of 'Nastasia, clear-cut as a marble bust before black velvet.

Hagan, half risen from his seat, blinked and looked again. Yes, there was the face he had carried in memory since last he had seen it framed by the benevolent chintz of the bishop chair—great black eyes, warm full lips, childish curve of chin to throat. And as a baleful penumbra to this vision of beauty, right beside the clean round of one dusky cheek was a hint of fiery whisker, the bulk of a black shoulder.

The two cars were backing away from each other. Hagan softly let down the window before him and spoke low to his driver.

"Follow that car as far as it goes. A pound besides the fare in it for you if you don't lose it."

"Ur-r!" was the grudging acceptance of orders. The taxi man already had begun to turn before the tonneau of the opposing car was opposite Hagan's window. When he had completed his maneuver the red star of the other's tail light was blinking to extinction in the fog.

The chase would not have lasted long had the fog not mercifully shredded thin when the two cars were threading through Hyde Park. On the long stretch of Edgware Road the gray murk thickened again and Hagan, on the edge of his seat and with every fiber of him strained to breaking, watched a red star ahead disappear and swing back to vision half a dozen times. Regent's Park was skirted—a bulk of forest heavy in gloom. Silent streets were come to: streets lined with high walls hedging off from an unreal world mysteries of mansions unseen.

At the end of eons of anxiety Hagan's car began to slow. He leaned out of his opened window and saw the lights of cars parked along a curb. Just ahead the red dot that had been so elusive over miles of streets was slowing to a stop beneath a murky light set in the masonry of a high garden gate. Hagan quickly shoved two pound notes into the hand of his chauffeur

and leaped to the darkness of the walk.

Just in time to hear the creak of hinges and to catch a glimpse of a black uncovered head as it passed by the side of a man with red whiskers under the arch of the gate. A harsh click marked the closing of the iron grille behind them.

Three minutes later Hagan was over that garden wall—a friendly tree limb had given him vantage for a high leap—and he felt the mold of a garden under his feet. Blackness impenetrable pressed upon him.

ANDREVIEFF, one-time admiral of the Black Sea Fleet, was in a mellow mood. Above the banks of roses and dazzle of silver on the table his thin, bearded face—the face of a jaded satyr—showed a play of lively animation. He was charmed with his hostess, a woman whose manner possessed just that requisite touch of provocative boldness to flick the dulled sensibilities of one such as Andrevieff. The company of fifteen pleased him: most of them refugees from the imperial régime in Russia; a scattering of lively Englishwomen of the set since made notorious by the memoirs of one of their number. This little dinner *intime*, so discreetly arranged to protect from the social world the incognito of the guest of honor, was Andrevieff's first relaxation since coming to London on his mission of importance; he was making the most of it.

Hardly so with his aide and confidential courier Popondrov. That young man was as miserable as a man could be without making a spectacle of himself. Saddled with a dinner partner who essayed roguish love-making and rippled light ribaldries off her tongue, Popondrov was hard put to it to maintain the rôle he had established for himself in the swift circle of the émigrés here in London. The wretched man's inner mind was in a fever of speculation concerning what might be going on in a low street of Pimlico; how fared the mission of a certain forthright American fellow on rescue bent. This Hagan: after all, was it only what he called ridiculously his news sense that was prompting him to all this exertion in the matter of a lost 'Nastasia? Did this clear-eyed chap with the devilish faculty for going to the root of things wish to find the girl only to build a newspaper column out of his success?

"And now, my dear Admiral"—it was the charming hostess who included all the white shirt-fronts in her gesture—"instead of the ladies withdrawing to leave you men free to discuss our frailties, you will pay us the honor of accompanying us to the music room. Perhaps there I may be able to show you a paragon of feminine beauty by which all of us unfortunate women may be most cruelly held in comparison."

She led the way through tapestried halls to a large room on the ground floor which once might have been a conservatory looking out on the park of trees, but which had been converted into a miniature theater. Tapestries hung across the walls of glass, screening them. At the far end of the room a small stage was raised a few feet above the floor and made to seem remote by a trick of massed palms at either end of the proscenium. Curtains of black velvet dropped behind these.

When her guests had been seated at little tables and periwigged servants had passed coffee, liqueurs and cigarettes Madame the hostess summoned to her a pallid young man with musician's hair and put a question or two. He nodded and disappeared behind the curtains, soon to reappear with three musicians. Two of them carried violins under their arms; a third held a strange lyre shape with little discs of silver suspended in ranks thereon. They took their seats before the masking palms at the stage front. There was a scraping of strings. The lights flickered out.

Suddenly the room was clamorous with a wild strain of strings like the neighing of mares; that and a furious drubbing of metal discs in harmony. The shadowy curtains parted. Light beyond them, at first impalpable as beginning glimmerings of dawn, slowly waxed to reveal the stage a fairy glade of greenery. It was a sacred grove on old Lesbos; in the deep center stood a single marble shaft surmounted by a bust of Astarte, pagan goddess of love and life.

The bacchanalia of the violins swept into frenzy. Then out into the sacred grove darted a lithe figure. She was all white flesh and shaggy wolf skin. Her night-black hair tumbled madly down over one white shoulder from a head thrown far back in ecstasy. Arms like white reeds wove vivid patterns over her head to bring

cup-shaped cymbals to clash. Sharp votive cries sprang from parted lips.

"'Nastasia!" The cry out of the dark where sat the audience was half a gasp. Young Popondrov was on his feet.

The dancer wavered, missed a step, then recovered. Her head did not turn to the direction of the cry. Popondrov sank into his seat. Habit of repression, which was his code, was again master of him. The stir about the tables in the dark which Popondrov's exclamation had caused quickly subsided before the magic lure on the stage.

Now the little votary was kneeling before the bust of Astarte, and her straightened arms were swinging in wide arcs to the sharp clap of the cymbals. Now up and striding stiff-legged, she exemplified unconscious pride of youth in the spring-time of the world. The stride dissolved into a run, a gallop. Frenzy seized her. She whirled; she dipped. Her bared legs twinkled mazily against the green of the forest glade. Her tireless arms seemed pale serpents lancing at the air.

The dark beyond the stage was breathless with suspense. Jaded guests to whom sensuous novelties were strangers found themselves enthralled. Andrevieff, unheeding the whispered pleading for commendation from the woman by his side, filled his eyes, filled his whole cindered soul with the glory of youth exultant.

With a final pirouette on stiffened toes before the goddess Astarte the little dancer sank exhausted at the foot of the marble. Curtains rustled softly across the sacred grove to shut it from sight.

From behind the curtains a scream—sound of a pistol shot—a coughing bellow which died in a groan.

MEANWHILE—starveling word at the behest of the writer incompetent to report all three rings of a circus simultaneously—what of Jim Hagan, come as prowler in the outer dark? Sufficiently diverting his adventures in a shadowed garden of St. John's Wood and immediately elsewhere.

After his drop from the wall he found himself in a copse of thorny broom distinctly hostile. Making his way carefully and groping out of the thicket, he perceived parallel slits of lights at a distance through the trees; these would mark the house

which had swallowed up 'Nastasia and the slaver Smirnoff. Dodging from tree trunk to box hedge, Hagan made devious advance upon the lighted windows.

He had not taken twenty steps when he got the shock of his life. Lifting one leg high to clear a small hedgerow, he planted his foot on something that moved. Instantly his leg jerked back. A dark head and shoulder lifted cautiously above the hedge.

"That you, Hunter?" came the challenge in a low whisper.

"Hum," Hagan ventured, his heart hammering.

"Well, bear around to the right of the house," came the order. "You'll find the chief stationed somewhere near the conservatory."

Hagan lost no time making off before further exchange of conversation with a mysterious shape in the fog might be necessary. He was dumfounded. What could this mean—"the chief"—men who spoke clear English taking up stations here about a mansion in St. John's Wood?

A raid? The earmarks of such an event were recognizable. But a raid by whom and against whom? Was this house in the dark park a Red headquarters against which Scotland Yard might be moving? If so, what particular event—what circumstance wherein 'Nastasia might be playing even an unwilling part—was going forward to precipitate action by the sleuths from Whitehall? Hagan felt his skin prickling as, stealthily, he made a detour.

He settled himself in the safe shadow of a great syringa bush perhaps fifty feet away from where a faint glimmer of glass marked a bowed wing of the house for a conservatory. None could find him here unless the searcher actually laid a hand on him. He needed respite and security in order to do some thinking.

Absolutely nothing for him to do but bide his time and when action came to join in it as best he could, trusting to the darkness to cover his identity until he was haply behind those blurs of light showing through the trees.

The minutes dragged. Once he saw, or thought he saw, the head of a man outlined for an instant against dull radiance which seemed to be escaping from a faultily screened window of the conservatory. Again, after an eternity of waiting, a

whistle somewhere away over by the gate shrilled a single thin pipe. This was followed a minute later by the noise of some heavy gas vehicle creaking to a stop in the street beyond.

Then a sound of music—a wild, dissonant skirl of fiddles coming faintly from behind the conservatory glass. The barbaric bray of it chilled Hagan.

When the music was at its wildest the watcher in the syringa bush was brought up standing at sight of figures running crouched across the brief strip of lawn between the nearest shadow of hedges and the conservatory wing. Three—four—six of them for an instant were visible, then melted into the shadowy bulk of the glassed extension. Impulse pushed Hagan out of his hiding and across the open zone. He, too, dissolved into the uniform blackness beneath a low balcony. His was one of several bodies packed there; pitchy darkness prevented a count of the number by any of them.

"Now, men, when we go through look out for Smirnoff," a voice whispered. "He probably will shoot. Kill him if you have to. Hunter, you and Gates round up the woman."

The wild music within ceased. "Now!" came the command.

Hagan found himself clambering over the balustrade. A sharp snap and a glass door opened. Silently a file of men pushed through into a dimly lighted passage between stage scenery and the conservatory's outer wall. Caution prompted Hagan to permit the others to pass ahead of him.

NOT three paces had he taken when he heard a girl scream, then the sound of a revolver shot. He leaped forward. The passage opened into a small space behind scenes, brilliantly lighted.

There was the end of the night's drama: The toad-like figure of Smirnoff, the red man, asprawl upon the floor, an automatic clutched in his fingers; his beard burned like living flame against the chalk white of his flabby cheeks. A negro maid with apron over head shivering in hysteria. Men clustered round the narrow space—those men whom Hagan had followed in from the dark.

But what held Hagan's eye was a cowering figure half fallen against the prop of a stage piece away from the strong light.

Her little body was partly clad in a wolf skin. Thin white arms were laced around her black head to shut out an odious sight. She sobbed convulsively.

Before Hagan could reach her the raiders were hurrying out onto the sylvan stage set. A light went up out there. An authoritative voice was saying, "Everybody keep seated!"

"'Nastasia!" Hagan leaned over a pelted shoulder to whisper. "'Nastasia, I'm here."

Swiftly a little face framed in tumbling hair was turned to his. For a long instant black eyes, tear-flooded, were his to read the dawning wonder there. Then she murmured a little sigh and leaned heavily against him.

"Come! We'll get out of here," was his command. He snatched up from a chair an evening coat of velvet and threw it round the girl's half naked shoulders. She suffered herself to be led down the passage and out onto the balcony overhanging the garden. There Hagan stopped, gathered a light weight into his arms, mounted the balustrade and jumped.

Swiftly he ran through the garden toward the gate. His way was unopposed until he had passed through the opening in the wall onto the road outside. A man in civilian's clothes stopped him.

"Chief's orders," Hagan said shortly, and he pushed by to choose one of the waiting guests' cars at random. The chauffeur and footman, awed by the presence at the curb of a police van and waiting bobbies, offered no demur when Hagan commandeered a car. He lifted his light burden into the upholstered snugness.

"Where shall we drive to, sir?" the footman ventured.

"Anywhere you please until I give you further orders," was Hagan's surprising answer, and he took his seat beside the little bundle of wolf pelt and velvet in the dark tonneau. He put one comforting arm about that bundle and drew it close; no cavalier liberty this; the whole pitiful aspect of a tiny shadow mound there in the perfumed dark cried for that comforting arm.

And—wonder of wonders!—a bare arm crept hesitantly up to find his neck and there clung while cold fingers patted it. A child afraid of the dark was finding delicious protection from bogies.

So they trundled through the dark and the light-splashed fog, a mystified man at the wheel taking turns at random. Hagan was silent, for what could he say with such a gulf between her tongue and his?

Finally in a tired murmur: "I am glad. I knew you would come—sometime."

Hagan's start almost lost him his seat. "English!" he exclaimed. "You speak English, then?"

"A little—Djim Hagan," whispered 'Nastasia.

"But—but that night—in my chambers you——"

"Yes—yes, Djim Hagan, then I must not speak it. For you would ask questions—and I could not answer. I am——"

"Yes, you are—what? What's the answer to all this riddle?" The man's impatience would not be denied.

"**I**NTELLIGENCE," 'Nastasia sighed as if this single word lifted a great weight of duplicity from her. "Agent of English Intelligence—in Russia, then here in London. Now I tell you, for my work is done and—and no more—never——"

The word "Intelligence" stiffened Hagan's spine. Most potent cog in Britain's war machine; tirelessly working engine of espionage and *contre-espionage* in all the subcellars of enemy chancelleries: This mite of a creature one of that engine's gears! Incredible!

As if to forestal him the girl went on in her drained voice: "That night in your chambers—Uncle Smirnoff sent me there to search Popondrov's papers for report of Admiral Andrevieff, his affairs in London. I slept, knowing Popondrov would not come, caring not who came. The constant fear—it made me a madwoman, Djim Hagan: one with no care for what happens. But to-night Smirnoff, he is gone; she, the Prussian woman, most dangerous spy in England, she is now with Intelligence—safe. And so——"

"And so now you begin to care what happens?" Even sudden boldness in Hagan's voice could not hide its trembling. He felt fingers tighten about his neck—a yielding of the wolf pelt under his arm.

"Now again—now again I begin to care, my Djim——" His lips denied the use of a period to that sentence.

THE END

The Pearls of St. Matthew's

A Rich Pearl Bank in the South Seas Brings Out the Good as Well as the Bad in Men—Tremendous Melodrama .

By Albert Richard Wetjen

YOU'RE a fool, Peterson. You're a damned fool! The older you grow, the more of a fool you seem to be."

Seth Orville snorted, breathed hard on his wisp of sandy mustache and glared at the young yellow-haired, blue-eyed giant who stood before him in the port bridge wing of the tramp ship *Ionia* steaming slowly past the heads of Sydney harbor and out into the wide Pacific. Both men were in tropic whites.

Jack Peterson grinned behind a huge hand and said "Yes, sir" in a very dutiful voice. The owner and master of the *Ionia* chewed rapidly at the burnt-out stub of a cigar that stuck up arrogantly from the corner of his mouth. Then he removed it abruptly with one thin bony hand, waved the other around generally and snarled.

"Quit that laughing, sir. Do you hear me? Quit! I distinctly told you to watch for that whisky I was sending aboard. Two dozen cases of the best Scotch. And what do I find, what do I find, sir? I find the damned steward has the stuff packed under a hundred ton or more of stores. What am I to do for a drink, eh? Answer me that! You know very well this climate never did agree with me. Bah!"

The inquisition raged. Seth Orville, furious, or seeming so, must know who had buried his whisky under the stores. Mate, chief steward, cook, sculleryman—he stopped.

"You, Peterson!" Orville whirled on his giant mate. "You're the cause of all this. Who in hell told you to pass the buck to some one else? I told you to personally see to those stores. And here the damned

order's been passed along and along until I suppose if I followed it down far enough I'd find one of the ordinary seamen saw to the job."

"I was busy looking after the new deck stores, sir," protested Peterson, a little irritated.

"Deck stores be damned! You were too busy making love to my niece, you mean. I positively forbade you to ever speak to her again. I forbade her to speak to you. What do you mean by it, sir? Both of you. What do you mean by it? You've got a hell of a nerve, m' son. You're worth probably five thousand quid all told while Allie'll have— Don't sniff at me, damn it! . . . Anyway, my whisky's more important than any deck stores. How do you think I can command this ship unless I drink occasionally? This climate never did agree with me. . . . Steward!"

The scared saloon steward came running, his usually immaculate pompadour disturbed with the haste of his approach.

"Yessir?"

"Just get a case of whisky out of the lazarette and bring a bottle up here. Fetch some soda, too. Better get all hands to help you shift the stores. And just remember, m' son, I keep account of all bottles. Don't let me find any missing at any time."

"No, sir. I understand, sir."

"Mind, Peterson. After this you do as you're told. Is that clear? Do as you're told or else you'll find the devil's own wrath will strike you. Understand?"

"Very clearly, sir, I'm sure."

"Don't get so damned sarcastic! C'm'long in the chart house and see where we're going. . . . Jackie, Jackie, you'll

be the ruin of me. How do you expect me to keep up discipline aboard when you deliberately disobey orders? Huh? H'm! . . . Allie gave me a note for you before we left. I put it on your bunk. Don't you ever let me catch you speaking to her again. I will not have it. You'll have to make some money first. . . . Huh! How's her head, helmsman?"

The man at the wheel, a lean, tanned Australian with sunken cheeks and a thatch of black wiry hair, looked up from the face of the brass quadrant and into the binnacle.

"Nor' b' east, sir," he grunted, shifting his quid of tobacco across his mouth.

"Then keep her so."

"Keep her so, sir," the man repeated and looked after his captain with an amused smile as he trotted with Peterson into the chart house.

"Whisky, sir," said the steward, poking his head inside the house half an hour later.

Orville looked up from the chart he was scanning, grunted and pointed to the table near his hand.

"Put it there, steward. See there are some glasses here, too. Two or three at the very least."

"Some glasses, sir. Yessir," mumbled the steward and hurried away.

PETERSON straightened up from bending over the table and scratched his head. He leaned against the pigeonholes containing the code flags and regarded the little captain thoughtfully.

"Where we bound for this time?" he inquired. "We left Sydney with our holds empty and I know for a fact you turned down cargoes."

"Is that so? You know too damned much."

"I'd like to know where we're bound for, anyway."

"If you'd like to wait I might tell you. Shut up! I'm busy."

"All right," said Peterson.

Among all Orville's employees—and they were legion—Peterson was favorite. Orville owned more schooners than any other man in the Pacific. His plantations were wide-flung and his trading posts garnered the wealth of many islands. His income ran above six figures a year. The little man sailed the rusty, black-sided *Ionia* more

for pleasure than for anything else, finding it hard to get completely out of harness and retire after his strenuous years of amassing wealth. He was over sixty, weighed just one hundred pounds, and stood five feet one inch in height. It was said among those doctors who had examined him that he lived solely by whisky and will. Certain it was that he was nearly always slightly drunk. His reputation among the islands was an enviable one and there seemed to be no abating of his powers.

"Have a drink." Orville uncorked the bottle by his side and poured two stiff drinks into the glasses. He handed Peterson one and lifted another himself. "Here's how." The two men drank.

"Now," grunted the little millionaire, setting his glass down with a bang. "Since you're so damned inquisitive I'll tell you a trifle. C'm'long here and peer at this chart." He jabbed a bony forefinger on the center of the South Pacific Ocean.

Peterson bent and read aloud: "*Charlotte Bank. Position Doubtful.*"

"Now that place," Orville commenced, "is on the outskirts of a small archipelago of as yet unreported islands. A few whaling captains know of them and that's all. We're going to an island just forty miles northwest of Charlotte Bank, which, by the way, the charts have marked four miles from its correct position."

"And what," asked Peterson, "are we going there for?"

"If you'd give me time to talk I might tell you," Orville snarled. "Here, have another drink."

He refilled the empty glasses, tossed off a stiff three fingers at a gulp and set his glass down with a bang again. Peterson sipped his liquor slowly and listened with all his attention.

"Some five years ago a man came to me and asked for a schooner and five thousand pounds in cash for a half share in a lost pearl bank known as St. Matthew's. Gave his name as Channing, Paul Channing. Knew him slightly through a planter of mine in the Bismarcks. I believed he was square. As usual, I was right. . . . What are you grunting at?"

"Now the bank of St. Matthew's has been the gossip of the beaches ever since I can remember. . . . Drink that whisky if you're going to. Don't stand there sucking

like a baby! . . . You can ask any islander from Brisbane to Frisco and he'll give you the tale. Supposed to have been found and worked first by a Chink named Hu Lao and then taken from him by an old-time semi-pirate called 'Black' Bart. Guess the Chink's throat was slit. All this occurred about fifty years ago.

"Since that time the place's been more or less of a myth, position supposed lost and all that sort of thing. Then this Channing pops up in Apia and touches me for a cool five thousand and a schooner. He had a map and he had the dope so I gave him the ship and the money and bought him a gin highball. Also I sent an agent of mine with him to help him clean up the bank. That, as I said once, was five years ago. I never knew, from then to the day before yesterday, what became of my expedition."

Orville grunted and poured out another drink, a very small one.

"THE day before yesterday," he resumed, glass in hand, "I ran across a man sleeping on the grass of the Domain back of Sydney. He was— Want another drink? No? Glad to see you're holding off the stuff, m'son. . . . He was Paul Channing. Also he was half dead with hunger and consumption. And part of his memory was gone. But he knew me and I remembered him. And I found out at last what had become of my expedition."

"Well, it appears that the man I sent as my agent, Stephen Marlowe, planned with the captain of my schooner, a chap called Jimmy—his real name, I forget—to maroon Paul Channing on some deserted atoll after getting the position of the pearl bank. Channing never gave me the position. Thought I might double-cross him, I suppose. Would be easy for me to give my officers instructions to get rid of him and then send another ship to the bank. Is that clear? I guessed what he thought but depended on my agent to keep up my end in what was intended to be a fair and square deal."

"Anyway, to cut a long story short, Channing was left with a helper of his, a half-caste native, on some blasted atoll. Stephen Marlowe and Jimmy sailed on to the pearl bank. Channing was picked up by a whaler blown out of her course and

searching for water, and ever since he's drifted about the ports of Australia. The native died. Channing's half mad from hardships and loneliness. That's all. . . . Have another drink?"

"Not just now, thanks. . . . Very interesting. Have you got the bank's position now?"

"Sure." Orville poured out another drink. "Channing's in my room. Thought I had framed up everything on him and was mad as hell. Wanted to kill me at first. Understood later."

Peterson blinked. "I never saw you come aboard with any one," he said.

"If you spent a little less time with my niece and a little more time on your job you might see quite a bit you miss seeing now," Orville suggested. "Come along and I'll let you see Channing. He's liable to kick through any minute. Asked me to bury him at sea. Been a sailor all his life and wants it so. . . . I've got the position of the bank in the log-book. . . . Hello, what's that? Eight bells? Already? Huh! Where's Mr. Black?"

The third mate answered the question himself by appearing in the doorway just then. He was a merry-eyed, fresh-faced youngster of twenty-three, dressed in a neat uniform suit of blue serge with a thin gold band round the cuffs. His high spirits got on Orville's nerves occasionally.

"Come to relieve the watch, sir," said the young officer, touching the peak of his cap. He addressed Peterson. The mate nodded.

"Fetch along the glasses," Orville grunted. "We'll go down and see Channing."

Peterson obediently picked up the glasses and followed Orville out of the chart house and along the bridge deck to his cabin. They met Mackenzie, the Scotch chief engineer, on the way and Orville grunted a greeting while Peterson nodded.

"'Lo, chief. Come an' have a drink. Got a freak t' show you. Name o' Channing. Pearls, lost islands, pirates 'n' all kinds o' romance. . . . Need your spanner, mebbe." Mackenzie always fought with his spanner.

A MAN got weakly to his feet as the trio trooped into the cabin and spread out to seek chairs—a man so grotesquely thin, pasty-faced and hollow-cheeked it seemed

a wonder that his great burning eyes remained in his head. His clothes, a white suit of Orville's, were somewhat short for him in the arms and legs, but otherwise were a good fit. And the little millionaire himself was a slender man and only five feet one inch in height. The stranger was nearly six feet, clean-shaven, lantern-jawed and bald.

"Channing, Peterson, chief engineer," grunted Orville with a wave of one hand, the other being busy in salvaging the whisky bottle from the side pocket of his jacket. "Peterson, chief, Channing," he ended with another wave. "Partner o' mine."

He produced the bottle; poured liquor into the glasses Peterson had brought; handed a drink to Channing.

"Gentlemen, I wish you health," Channing said courteously and raised his glass.

"Yer heal'," grunted Mackenzie.

"Same here," said Peterson, looking keenly at the wreck opposite him.

Orville merely mumbled and drank without wasting time, leaning against the circular table. He set his glass down with a bang.

"These are friends of mine. . . . Hic. . . . Yes, sir." Orville waved around gravely. "C'n trust 'em abso-absolutely. I told 'em about Marlowe and Jimmy. Tell 'em what you told me."

The wreck nodded and set down his glass. Then in a low strained voice he gave the tale of the expedition to the lost pearl bank some five years before. It was much the same tale that Orville had told in his jerky way, plotting, marooning, the hopeless drifting about Australia and the total disappearance of the schooner with Marlowe and Jimmy aboard. She had never arrived at any port, no man had seen her. Either she had been wrecked or else her name and lines had been changed beyond recognition.

"Half of that bank is still mine and the other half's Orville's, according to the terms of our old agreement. I had the cash and the use of the schooner. It was my fool fault for not being on the lookout. Still there ought to be plenty left. For myself I don't care. All the money in the world wouldn't do me any good now. I am a dead man. But I'd like to see Mr. Orville get even for me. I'd like to see him

get his just reward for staking me five years ago, if only so that he would know I was square."

"I decided anyway to run along and see. Don't give a damn about the pearls either, but object to having my agents buck me," Orville supplemented solemnly. Then he snorted, drew clear of the table and took a few jerky jog-trotting turns up and down the cabin. "You'll be nominally in charge of this ship, Peterson," he said after a while. "I've a big lump of curiosity to know just what Marlowe'll have to say if we find him."

Orville sat down with a grunt and commenced talking about another pearling venture he had indulged in some years before. Peterson, the chief, and the wreck listened intently, for the little millionaire could tell a very gripping tale. It took his hearers across the world and back, far along the years, pulsed with his own personality and was as vital as in those days when it had been born.

Nothing of importance occurred during the long steam northeast from Sydney to the Charlotte Bank. The *Ionia* crept into Noumea for a mess of fresh vegetables, some fruit and a little time for the crew to stretch their legs ashore. After that she steamed south of the Loyalty Islands, passing north of uninhabited, dreary Walpole Island and curving still more north to leave Fiji some five hundred miles on her starboard beam, until she reached Charlotte Bank.

Getting bearings from the boiling white reach of sand and surf, Orville headed the *Ionia* northwest for the half legendary St. Matthew's bank of pearl oysters over which, if legend ran true, an old-time Chinaman and a semi-pirate had fought and much blood had been shed. The little millionaire sent a man aloft to the fore-crosstrees to keep a lookout for the palms to rise above the sea rim.

FEW men could have afforded to take such a ship as the *Ionia* away on a more or less haphazard chase such as Orville was engaged in. But he never allowed money to stand in his way when he was intent on accomplishing something. He had a notion that even should he find the bank of St. Matthew's cleaned out he might be able to get some clue there as

to where Jimmy the captain and Stephen Marlowe had gone with the pearls.

And now that the trail was five years old it was more than probable that the little millionaire would find the more zest in taking it up. The harder the task the more he enjoyed it, usually. One thing was certain: if he really felt enough in earnest about the bank and the pearls he would not leave the trail until he secured what was rightfully his.

Channing died without regret and without much pain, cursing Stephen Marlowe, just as the palm tufts of the lost island rose over the curve of earth. Orville buried his partner with the sunset, calling all hands on deck and stopping the ship's way until the grating on the rail of the foredeck had been tilted and the canvas-wrapped body had sunk in fifty fathoms of clear blue sea.

After the burial Orville turned briskly to the task of getting his ship through the somewhat shallow schooner entrance in the high reef to the south, a couple of men in the chains and two lookouts aloft to cry out when they sighted breakers or coral branches that reached too near.

The *Ionia* was safely at anchor inside the shelter of the reef by the time darkness fell, and Orville ordered away the whaleboat. From the shore came no sign of life, though what looked like a few rude native huts had been seen amid a small palm grove before sunset.

"Quite populated," grunted the little millionaire as he stood at the rail and watched Peterson clamber down a pilot ladder to the white-painted whaleboat below. "Tell the birds ashore you're skipper of this packet," he called, not too loud. "And get what dope you can on who and what they're doing there. Marlowe, as I remember, was a thin lathy bird with a broken nose. Jimmy was gray and fat and had a face like a cow's. Got your gun?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Then don't stay ashore longer than you can help. I'll be waiting to hear the news. And leave the girls alone."

Peterson growled out something wrathfully as he dropped into the stern sheets. The little millionaire leaned over the rail and glared down at the boat, dimly seen in the starlight.

"And Peterson!"

The mate stood with one hand hold-

ing on to the pilot ladder and looked up. "Sir?"

"Don't get drunk!"

"Go to hell!" the yellow-haired giant snorted wrathfully, and Orville chuckled as he made his way back to the bridge and to his room to await his mate's report.

WHOEVER was ashore on the island either was not aware of the ethics of island hospitality or else was not at all interested in visitors, thought Peterson, as the whaleboat grounded on the sand. He landed by jumping lightly over the bows and peered along the beach, that seemed to be deserted in the starlight except for a pile of rocks about fifty yards away, looming ghostlike through the murk. If any one at all lived on the island—and the presence of the huts seemed to show that some one did—he kept very quiet. Not a light betrayed him. The island appeared deserted.

He ordered the whaleboat to be held for a while and started to walk up the beach toward the palms where the huts stood. His path led by the pile of rocks on the sand and, as he stepped into the deeper shadow there, he suddenly pitched forward, twisted sideways, and then collapsed, vivid flashes of light searing his eyes, a droning noise inside his head. Then blackness. Ghostly figures, naked, chuckling, hopped about him. He was bound with rope of coconut fiber. He was bundled against the rock out of the way. Then the ghostly figures moved toward the water's edge.

The seamen in the whaleboat, four of them, were smoking and talking together, giving a short thrust with an oar now and then to keep the boat from grounding completely. They were leaning forward on the stretchers so that they could see each other's faces in the gloom. The ghostly creeping figures were on them with a rush. There were a few sharp cries, drowned by the droning surf, a short, brief struggle, and then the seamen, bound hand and foot, were carried up the beach and deposited unconscious beside the still unconscious Peterson. After that the ghostly figures returned to the whaleboat.

Mr. Collins, the second mate of the *Ionia*, and Mackenzie the chief were yarning together of various things when the whaleboat scraped alongside and the pilot ladder shook as some one ascended.

"So soon?" the chief grunted. "Ah'm thinkin' th' yellow-headed boy didna stay ashore long."

"That's so," replied Collins without much interest, and he went on discussing something about winds and currents.

Neither Mackenzie nor he, both of them gazing outboard, troubled to look round when the faint thud of feet landing on the deck reached them. They supposed it was Peterson. So they never even knew what struck them. They both dropped limply, the second mate half over the rail, his arms dangling, the chief into the scuppers in a huddled heap. Scientifically they were bound.

Four of the seamen and two firemen were asleep on their mattresses on the fo'c's'le-head. Three other firemen were playing cards by the light of a hurricane lamp. The ghostly, still chuckling figures, naked as dawn, poured up the two companionways leading from the for'ard well-deck and swooped on the three players. The hurricane lamp went out abruptly. A few gurgles, a half of an oath, were heard from under the darkness of the awnings. Then there was silence. Without being awakened, those men sleeping were bound and rendered more surely unconscious.

And not a thing had aroused the suspicions of the rest of those aboard.

Next, the iron door that shut the end of the alleyway leading to the fo'c's'les was closed and fastened with the screw clamp; somewhat rusted, but working just the same, despite the noise it made. That imprisoned all those for'ard, supposing the hatches were battered down, and they were, which made it useless to travel from the forepeak to the holds by way of the shelter deck. The ghostly figures went about further business. The ship fell easy prey.

Orville was sitting in his cabin, well back in his chair, his legs cocked on the table and his fingers clasped across his stomach. He was smoking a black cigar with great rapidity and drinking from time to time. His bared head shone in the electric light and his sandy hair betrayed unsuspected streaks of gold. The door opened behind him and he removed his cigar and twisted jerkily round. And for the first time in many years he had a genuine scare.

He almost fell out of his seat. He dropped his cigar to the carpet. His eyes

bulged. Then very slowly he brought his feet from the table and set them down. Still more slowly he swung round completely and managed a snort.

"Hell!" he said, and blinked.

That which had entered essayed a smile, a grotesque smile, mostly hidden by hair. Then that which had entered closed the door behind it and another figure that suddenly materialized from the darkness of the bridge deck. Both figures came forward and perched on the table.

Orville glared. He said feebly, "Well, I'll be damned!" and blinked again. Then gradually he understood.

BOTH figures were of men, stark naked, brown as Kanakas. But they were white men, for their eyes were blue. One was thin and lathy and had a broken nose. The other was short and fat and had a face like a bulldog's—what could be seen of it. The thin man's hair was a dirty yellow and long uncombed and unwashed. Also it fell to his shoulders. The fat man's hair was iron-gray and was as matted and as long as that of his companion. Both men had long matted beards and mustaches. Both had the same wild gleam in their eyes. Both eyed Orville hungrily. The little millionaire's nerve came back with a snap.

"Marlowe and Jimmy," he said calmly, and bending picked up his cigar and puffed it to a glow again.

The thin man nodded curtly and smiled. "Marlowe," he said, throatily.

The fat man nodded and grinned. "Jimmy," he said.

Orville grunted. "Well?"

For a while there seemed to be a deadlock. Then Orville casually reached round to his hip-pocket as though to get a wallet or a handkerchief. Next instant he lay stunned on the carpet, a thin trickle of red running from his forehead. The thin man, Marlowe, hefted the automatic he had taken from Peterson and smiled again.

"That makes the lot," he observed.

"The lot," repeated Jimmy, and clawed at his beard. "My God, whisky! Look!" He pointed to the bottle on the table and both of them sprang for it simultaneously.

Marlowe got it first and he drank long and deeply while the fat man cursed and clawed at his hands. Then he drank, too. When

both were finished, gasping, they wiped their lips.

When Orville came to, it was dawn. He found himself lashed in his chair. At the table Marlowe and Jimmy were poring over a chart, still naked and unshaven, and talking together thickly. Two empty bottles rolled on the carpet. A half-full bottle stood near the chart and from it each man now and then took a drink. Presently Marlowe looked up and saw that Orville was awake.

"Hello," he said. "How's things, Seth?"

"I'm thirsty!" groaned the little millionaire. Then his anger rose: "What the devil's the meaning of this?"

Marlowe grinned and took another swig at the bottle.

"We began to think we were here for life," he said, at last. "Five years, nearly, we've been stuck. How did you find the place?"

"I found Channing." Orville's eyes narrowed.

Marlowe and his companion started slightly.

"Found Channing, eh? Why, we buried Channing at sea five days after we left Apia." Marlowe's voice was uneasy.

"Liar," responded the little millionaire. "I found Channing broke in Sydney. A whaler picked him off the place you left him."

Jimmy said "Oh!" and then turned to Marlowe. "I said we ought to have finished that lean swine," he growled. "What's the good of leaving a guy alive?"

Marlowe snarled back at him. "And we'd still be on this island without a chance to get away. Don't talk like a fool. Thank Gawd for the lucky chance that Orville run across Channing and came here."

"How is it you're still here?" interjected Orville curiously.

Marlowe glared across at him. Then he grinned and spat on the carpet.

"Luck! Just bloody luck! We came here in the *Wenning*, the schooner Jimmy here commanded, and damned if we didn't pile up and sink like a stone. Not a scrap saved. The bunch of us, Kanakas and all, swam to this blasted hunk o' land and here we are yet. Not a thing. Not even a light o' nights."

"**T**HINK of it," said Jimmy explosively. "Think of it! We blokes with thousands of pearls and couldn't even get a candle, nor a hunk of beef, nor a pair of shoes. Coconuts and fish, that's all we've had for years. All that time, and we millionaires, well-nigh. Think o' what we've missed! It's hell t' have nothing and have the money to buy the whole bloody world with."

"Aw, shut up!" Marlowe snarled at him. "Shut up. We'll have all that coming."

"But why lay me out?" grunted Orville. "And where's my crew?"

"Like you, harmless," Marlowe told him. "We saw you prancing about on the bridge with that yellow-haired swine of a Peterson when you came up to the island from the east. I spotted you from the top of a palm. And we guessed you'd know about Channing, or you wouldn't have had the figures. 'Sides, think we're going to give the pearls to you? After we've had those years o' grubbing and going without? 'Tain't likely. No, sir, you're going to stay where we've been staying. And I hope you'll have to wait as long fer a ship as we have."

"So you worked the pearls, eh?" Orville insisted.

"We did. Want to see 'em? Make your mouth water."

So Orville saw the pearls and was thrilled through all his little body at the wonder of them. Rose and black and white and water-color and even some faintly blue. From as big as a filbert-nut to as small as a pinhead. He estimated there were at least five hundred worth big money, and probably twice as many other fine stones. The value ran well into tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands. Marlowe had them in a bag made of coconut fiber. He kept it fastened around his waist and touched it every now and then to make sure it was safe. Orville thought of the agony the two men must have suffered. Five years with a fortune on an almost barren island! And they were men to whom money meant all the pleasures of the flesh. They had no mental enjoyments. St. Matthew's must have been hell to them, and doubly hell with all the wealth they had garnered.

"And there's nigh seven hundred ton of shell stacked on the other side of the

island," Jimmy assured Orville after the pearls had been greedily pawed over.

"Say!" said Orville, holding his temper in leash as well as he could. "Do I understand you're going to maroon my whole crew on the island?"

Marlowe nodded and chuckled as he tied his pearls on again.

"But that'll do no good," the little millionaire protested. "You can't handle the *Ionian* alone."

"We ain't going to take the *Ionian*. We're taking a couple whaleboats and grub. And we're taking all the cash in your safe and what else we can find. And we're going to open the sea-cocks of this craft and let her sink so's you can't follow us."

"What if I say you can have the pearls? That is," he corrected himself as he remembered half of them were Channing's and that he also owed his partner some revenge, "say half the pearls."

Marlowe sneered at that and Jimmy laughed.

"Nothing doing," the thin man replied. "We're taking all. And you'd better shut up now and say nothing. We've got you all where we want you."

"Maybe. . . . Damn your souls!" burst out the little millionaire, struggling vainly at his bonds. Then he was still. He realized suddenly that neither of the two men before him was sane. Marlowe only laughed.

PETERSON came to a little before dawn and lay for a long time blinking up at the dark sky and wondering what had happened. He remembered walking up from the whaleboat and passing by the rock cluster. Then darkness. His head pulsed and throbbed. He found himself tied hand and foot. He had been attacked, knocked out, rendered helpless. A groan caught his ear. He twisted his head and saw a dark form beside him. He spoke in a low voice. A voice answered him. The seamen. He was aware of other forms. He rolled savagely over to the rock heap until he reached the solid stuff. By pressing his shoulder against it and with a little writhing, he was able to get on his feet. He stood for a long time and surveyed the beach, the stars, the prone figures at his feet now stirring themselves and trying to sit

up. He saw lights still shining from the ports of the *Ionian*.

Then the dawn came, gray and wan, then silvery and pale, finally crimson, blazing rapidly up from the east, touching the sea with fire and thrilling with the hope of a new day. Peterson grunted, shook his head, trying to dispel the throbbing there, and then examined his bonds. He well-nigh laughed. They would have held any ordinary man. But he was Jack Peterson, the strongest man in the West Pacific. His six feet and several odd inches of height quivered as he flexed his muscles. Then he put forth his strength. The fiber lashings creaked, gave a little, but held. He grunted as he relaxed.

One of the seamen struggled to his feet beside the giant mate and said a few words. Peterson nodded and grinned. Then he hopped round till his face was toward the rock and his bound arms toward the man. The man bent forward, or rather fell forward, resting his head between the mate's shoulder blades. His fine teeth bit into the lashings. Five minutes later Peterson bulged his great muscles again and he was free. The seamen swore with delight. Peterson loosed them and led them to the water's edge. He scratched his head.

The whaleboat was alongside the ship, bobbing slightly at the foot of the pilot ladder. No one seemed to be in view on the *Ionian*, though the lights still gleamed palely from the ports. Two of the seamen talked between themselves for a moment and then, without a word to their superior, waded out into the deep water and swam toward the whaleboat.

Unmolested they clambered over the bows and let go the painter. Five minutes later they had the boat ashore and the other two seamen and Peterson were clambering in.

"Very careful," the giant mate warned. He found his automatic gone. The whaleboat crept back to the *Ionian*.

Peterson went up the pilot ladder first and dropped silently to the deck, followed by the puzzled seamen. The first thing the mate saw was Collins groaning in the scuppers, tied hand and foot. Quickly he was released, hauled to his feet, and plied with questions. But he shook his head. He was just as puzzled as they. Mackenzie was spotted and freed. The

Scot was wrathful and profane. All he wanted was a spanner and a sight of his unknown assailant. Peterson led the growing party to the fo'c's'le and unlatched the door. With the philosophy of sailors the trapped crew were asleep.

Still more puzzled, Peterson went into the saloon, and then he began to find traces of strangers. In the little pantry, just aft the saloon and opening into it, the hatch was off the lazarette and the small-store hold showed vacantly to the deck head. Cautiously approaching the opening with the others on his heels, Peterson peered below. The sight he saw there held him speechless for a moment.

Ten Kanakas, naked, long-haired, lay fast asleep amid a perfect riot of food. They had apparently opened every case they could reach. Beef tins half empty, cases of biscuits, jars of fruit, jam, tins of chocolate, packages of dried vegetables, were all jumbled together around and between the gorged and sleeping natives.

With the aid of Mackenzie and Collins, Peterson put the hatch over the lazarette and clamped it down. Then he led the way up to the bridge. A glance in the third mate's room showed him wriggling in his bunk, bound with sheets, and Collins went inside to release him. Mackenzie and Peterson went on to Orville's room. The seamen Peterson had sent along to the engine-room to see if everything was all right there.

"Damn your souls!" the giant mate was in time to hear Orville say.

Then Marlowe laughed. Peterson went into the cabin with a rush and stopped swiftly as he took in the situation, half bent forward, his great hands opening and shutting. Orville crowed delightedly.

"Jackie, boy! Swat him for me! Mackenzie, you Scotch heathen, come——"

MARLOWE had whipped round and snatched up the automatic he had laid on the table near the chart. Jimmy picked up the half bottle of whisky and flung it at Peterson. The automatic spat sharply, Mackenzie fell sideways to the bridge deck with a bullet in his shoulder and another in his leg. Peterson staggered a little as the bottle hit the door jamb and

the whisky stung his eyes and cheeks. Then he had Marlowe by the throat and wrist and was putting forth his full strength. The insane man was helpless as a child, but he struggled as best he could. The automatic went off once more and smashed the light globe in the deckhead. Jimmy picked up a chair and rushed snarling at the two struggling men. But Peterson, seeing the fresh adversary out of the corner of his eye, raised Marlowe and flung him with all his force at Jimmy.

Both men smashed into a corner, dropped and groaned, and then lay still. A cascade of pearls showered across the carpet. Peterson stood with legs astride and laughed and brushed his hands together. His laugh was hard. He knew what had happened. When they came to pick up Marlowe and Jimmy later they found that both their necks were broken.

Orville's first move, when he was released, was for the whisky bottle. And while he was drinking and Peterson was doctoring Mackenzie roughly, he was jerkily explaining matters.

"**F**IVE years!" he said. "They've been five years on this God-forsaken lump of land and rock. Don't tell me there is no justice! Think of that. Retribution? I'll say so. Damn my eyes! Just think. They killed Channing, or as good as killed him, and that's what they got. Five years, and with all that money in pearls. But they deserved it."

Peterson grunted and wound the last bandage round the chief's thigh. After he had told his own tale he said:

"When do we get away from this confounded place?"

"Just as soon as we get some seven hundred ton of shell off the island. Did you find any more naked barbarians hopping about aboard?"

"Ten of them in the lazarette. They're safe. I latched them in."

"Like your damned cheek. Did it occur to you my whisky's down there at their mercy? Have them hoisted on deck and shoved in a spare cabin somewhere. And about Marlowe and Jimmy. Poor fellows, poor fellows. We'll have to bury them decently, I suppose."

Another of Albert Richard Wetjen's tales of adventure in the wildest of the South Sea wilds will appear in April EVERYBODY'S—on sale March 15.

By the Author of "The Emperor's Old Clothes"
A New Mystery Series

Mr. Collin's Adventures

There Appeared Recently a Book by a New Author Entitled "The Emperor's Old Clothes." It Won Instant Success. Everybody's Is Glad to Announce a New Series by the Same Author Which Is Built Around the Same Central Character, Mr. Collin

By Frank Heller

I. The Story of the Absent-Minded Gentleman

GOTHENBURG ROAD lies in the northwest of London, on the outskirts of the fashionable quarter round Regent's Park. It still displays "traces of vanished beauty," as we read in old-time novels; formerly one of a network of elegant streets, it has fallen upon evil days. From Bloomsbury in the southeast, the boarding-houses have been gaining ground in steady numbers, and they have already captured the most important vantage posts of Gothenburg Road.

Half-way down Gothenburg Road rises a medium-sized three-storied building of respectable appearance (No. 492), which in the year 1906 presented a somewhat dilapidated exterior—also the sign "To Let." For a long time past, the rent which was asked—£450—seemed to warrant that Messrs. Jones and Greenaway, 21 Gilmour Square, would never succeed in letting it. So much greater was the astonishment of its companions in misfortune and of the neighboring boarding-houses, when during an April day of the same year a gang of workmen appeared, who set to with a will to renovate the premises and busied themselves with the four flower beds—each the size of a tablecloth. The sign "To Let"

disappeared and furniture vans drew up at the door.

"Upon my word, they have actually got rid of 492," remarked the boarding-houses. "Who on earth can be foolish enough to give £450 for that old barrack?"

"Fancy, we are going to have a neighbor in 492," said the people in the other houses. "Let's hope it won't be *another* boarding-house!"

Curiosity waned a few days later when it transpired that the house had been let to a foreigner, a Professor Pelotard from Paris, but it took a new lease of life when the Professor moved in. For he seemed fully resolved to keep Gothenburg Road in ignorance about himself and his doings. The prying eyes which focused themselves on him from behind curtained windows had to be content with the scant knowledge that the Professor was about thirty, extremely well groomed, the owner of a blue-gray Daimler, and that he lived by himself. His household consisted of a French cook and a Swedish maid. Questioned about their master's occupation, they were only able to impart that he was busy all day long on something very learned, and that presumably he was very rich.

With this information people had to be satisfied until in May a red-headed, vulgarly dressed man was observed leaving the house every morning, about half past eight. They hastened to question the Swedish girl, and again received unsatisfactory replies.

"The red-headed gentleman is the Professor's secretary," she declared, "who helps him in his work."

"But how," she was asked, "can he help him if he is away all day?"

That question the servant was unable to answer, and so the mystery remained unsolved.

Ultimately, on a fine May morning, Mr. Ingram, a resident in one of the most select boarding-houses of Gothenburg Road, chanced upon an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph* which seemed at last to shed some light on the Professor's activities.

It ran as follows:

Psychic research. Professor Pelotard of Paris is seeking data for his great scientific work, relating to various cases of collector's mania and similar crazes. As it is well known that such tendencies are characterized by acute absent-mindedness, mental worry and weakness of memory, you are asked to state—should you kindly answer this advertisement—how far the above applies to your case. Absolute discretion is guaranteed by Professor Pelotard, who will gratefully acknowledge all information submitted. Professor Pelotard's new psychic treatment prevents or effectually cures the troublesome after-effects which make absent-mindedness and loss of memory a veritable curse to those who suffer from them.

Apply by letter to Professor Pelotard, Gothenburg Road, London, N.W.

Perusal of the other papers showed that the Professor's advertisement, which formed a lively topic of conversation in all the boarding-houses, was to be found in practically all of them, from Liberal papers, like the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle*, to the venerable *Times* and the Conservative *Pall Mall*. It was to be found in *Punch* as well as in *Tit Bits*, also in all the magazines; and it made a brave show on the first page of the *Curio* and the *Collector's Journal*. Only in the cheap popular press was it missing. Its vignette represented a gentleman with an absent-minded and suffering look about his eyes, holding a volume of Shakespeare, and it soon became as famous as Pears' or Black and White.

From May onward Gothenburg Road noticed that there was a steady increase in the Professor's post. Every day the postman

delivered heavy packages and bundles of printed matter. But apart from that Mr. Pelotard remained unapproachable.

The year 1906 came to a close; 1907 came and went in its turn without bringing any appreciable changes in Gothenburg Road. Two new positions were captured by the encroaching boarding-houses. Professor Pelotard acquired a white Dion Bouton in place of his Daimler; a new housemaid replaced the Swede. But the Professor's post waxed more impressive from day to day and the ladies in the boarding-houses of Gothenburg Road continued to cast amorous glances at him, and the red-headed man was still seen leaving the house almost every morning.

It is now April, 1908, and we leave Gothenburg Road and Professor Pelotard to touch upon quite different matters. The newspapers, which had been filled all though the spring with questions of international importance, regarding the Morocco conflict, now turned their attention to a purely national affair.

SCARCELY ever had there been such excitement in the small business world of England—and that small business world is one of the chief arteries of the country—as during the three weeks the mystery lasted. A general distrust of the whole world, the acute fear of losing money—these were the feelings that reigned supreme; and people saw themselves deprived of their belief in the efficiency of the police force. Only one road seemed to be in front of them, and that pointed to anarchy.

What then had happened to bring about this state of affairs in the most law-abiding of countries? The suffragettes in 1908 were still harmless ewe-lambs, in search of a shepherd. Had the German specter reappeared? Were the Fenians making trouble? Or had the hundred thousand unemployed raised their heads? Nothing of the sort. The unknown, who for three weeks had defied the police, had terrorized the public, had laid sacrilegious hands on something more important than the independence of the nation, the Irish question, or the sacredness of landed property. With incredible audacity they had tampered with the coin of the realm and thus had struck the British people to the core.

The actual date in 1908 when the gang

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

of false coiners began their operations is uncertain. To judge by isolated reports they seem to have made different experiments in various localities all through the spring. But it was not until Monday, April 14th, that they launched their first important attack on the community at large.

On April 15th all the morning papers announced that on the previous day no less than 118 false sovereigns had been put into circulation in various parts of the city.

The coins, which were admirable counterfeits, had not provoked the slightest suspicion in the shops where they were tendered; the fraud had been discovered only when they had reached the banks. The panic was great, but it was hoped that the police would soon succeed in getting on the criminals' tracks. Clues were supposed to have been already found. The newspapers unanimously deplored these forgeries, but shared the hope of the business world that the culprits would soon be behind lock and key.

"In this country," said the *Morning Leader*, "gentlemen of this ilk have seldom for long found a market for their wares." And the *Times*, that aristocrat among press organs, closed its article on the affair with the following words: "We, and our colleagues, pity the victims of this occurrence; but at the same time we must express our astonishment at the ease with which people let themselves be duped. If there is one sound in the world which is better known than the sound of the English tongue, it is the sound of English gold."

The august paper was quite justified; but, if we may take the liberty of saying so, it was talking through its hat. For the chink of gold which it praised in such convincing terms had been so cleverly imitated that on the very next day, the 16th, the forgers succeeded in palming off no less than fourteen sham sovereigns in the offices of that very paper.

The same day brought further tidings of evil. Far from slackening in their efforts after their first success the gang seemed to be stimulated to fresh enterprise. In the East End as well as in the City itself the doings of Monday had been repeated, only on a far larger scale. About 250 sovereigns had been successfully planted in tobacconists' shops, bars, jewelers' and restaurants, all ringing as true as the coinage of

Monday. As on the previous day the swindlers had managed to evade detection, and their victims became aware of their losses only on visiting their respective banks. No clue of any importance was reported to the police, and the detectives were working for all they were worth. If any one had dared to hope that by the 17th the situation would be improved, that diffidence would be manifested by the criminals, all such hopes were doomed to disappointment. It was not enough that the ascertained number of counterfeit coins circulated during the day should have reached the total of 300 sovereigns, and that the swindlers' field of activities already ranged from South Kensington to the East Central district—there now came from Fenchurch Street in the east and from Kensington, south of the river, the first reports of counterfeit silver coins from two shillings upward; and a firm of tailors in Holborn proclaimed with loud lamentations the appearance of sham five-pound notes.

CONFUSION and amazement, thus can one sum up the following days—the 18th, 19th and 20th of April. The 18th was marked by the swindlers' first raid on the provinces—the 19th by their marauding expeditions to Scotland, the 20th—a Sunday—brought a temporary respite. A certain number of arrests was made, following on information given by alarmed shopkeepers; some of it led to the capture of old acquaintances of the police, who probably had no connection whatever with the affair; other suspects were released with or without apologies.

Three days later, on the 23rd, occurred the episode of Herr Werffel, from Silesia.

Herr Werffel was first seen in Oxford, where he succeeded in paying his hotel bill with a handful of counterfeit coins; before the matter could be discovered he had vanished from the town in his motor-car. This time, however, the scent was so hot that he was soon taken into custody. The credit of his capture belonged to the Axminster police. When arrested, he was found to carry about him no less than five small bags such as are commonly used by the banks, full of imitation sovereigns to the extent of £300. At last it seemed as if a leader of the gang had been laid by the heels and great was the jubilation of the press—but it did

not last. For it was proved, in accordance with Herr Werffel's declarations, which had been listened to with contemptuous disbelief, that he *was* a rich German sportsman, taking a jaunt through Europe in his motor-car, and that he had himself fallen a victim of the swindlers, having received the afore-said little bags in exchange for his money in a banking and travel agency in Amsterdam. Investigation in these offices (an old and well-known firm) disclosed the fact that only a week before they had accepted counterfeit English coins amounting to £270. Stricken dumb by the impudence of the gang, the authorities released Herr Werffel.

This happened on April 23rd and 24th. These days, as well as the preceding one, registered a succession of monotonously recurring symptoms: false coinage, silver and bank-notes, scattered wholesale; a terror-stricken public, and a feverishly working, but absolutely helpless police. Friday the 25th marked a new phase in the campaign against the swindlers.

On that day, the *Daily Mail* published a letter from a Mr. James Kenyon, hitherto unknown, of 5 Exeter Place, W. A note from the editor introduced him as a "promising private detective," Irish by birth, who had distinguished himself in several cases, which were not specified. The letter addressed to the editor was practically a challenge both to the police and to the malefactors:

Had I [wrote Mr. Kenyon] at my disposal the resources which are at the service of Scotland Yard, I make bold to affirm, at the risk of appearing a braggart, that I could achieve more than the detectives. As matters stand at present, the welfare of the nation is at stake and therefore I intend, in spite of my restricted means, to take the field against the evil-doers. [Mr. Kenyon was obviously an Irishman.] If I do not catch them within a week, or am unable to give the police sufficient information which will lead to their arrest, I will, once for all, relinquish my present career as a detective.

The public, highly amused at Mr. Kenyon's truly Irish conceit, but nevertheless impressed up to a point by his assurance, decided to await his bulletins of victory. And while Mr. Kenyon had been ready to throw the gauntlet to the unknown criminals, it was soon proved that they had been as quick to respond to his challenge. Saturday, the 26th of April, figured as their Austerlitz in the war they were waging upon society.

On this day no less than £1,210 in counterfeit coin and paper money were put into circulation from one end of London to the other—from Ealing to Whitechapel, from Croydon to Hendon. Shops of every kind were victimized. As usual, tobacconists and public-houses bore the brunt of the attack, but nobody was spared; and the general agency of the Dion Bouton Co., in Oxford Street, lifted up its voice and clamored for the blood of the criminals.

At half past three that afternoon, having previously announced his visit on crested note-paper, there appeared at their premises no less a personage than Lord Randolph Caxton, the intimate friend of the King, and a well-known man about town. Piloted by the suavely bowing manager, Lord Randolph inspected their exhibits and finally chose a big white limousine for which he paid a first instalment of £200.

"You are perhaps astonished that I pay in cash," he said smiling, "but as you may have read in the papers, I make a rule never to put my name to a check, and seldom to anything else."

LORD RANDOLPH'S affable manner met with obsequious response. He then initialed the contract (wherein it was stipulated that the remainder of the sum should be paid in a month's time), and drove away in the new car. Two hours later it was ascertained that the two hundred sovereigns were false and on closer investigation it transpired that Lord Randolph had not that day set foot outside the house, as he was suffering from a severe sprain.

Mr. Kenyon had received his answer and the next move in the contest was awaited with keen impatience.

Lack of space compels us to skim over the next few days. We must content ourselves with mentioning that every trace of the white limousine seemed to have vanished as completely as the audacious swindler. The description of both was broadcast through Great Britain but without any result, and 161 garages and repair shops in London and its surroundings were fruitlessly searched by Scotland Yard detectives.

Mr. James Kenyon, after closely sifting hundreds of reported cases, had come to the conclusion that the headquarters of the gang could be located within a radius of Holborn, King's Cross, Regent's Park and

Tottenham Court Road. This territory looked as blank on Mr. Kenyon's map as did that of Africa, before Stanley's travels, but since it is well known that forgers operate as far as possible from their base, Kenyon surmised that the latter was probably to be found in this district. Yet investigations in this neighborhood failed to produce any result. We must also report Mr. Kenyon's visit to the Amsterdam Exchange and Travel Agency, which yielded nothing beyond establishing the description of Lord Randolph's double, who had also played his little game there. Thereupon Mr. Kenyon called at the sanctum sanctorum of the Bank of England, the printing press. The outcome of this visit too was negative, though all his theories had encouraged him in the belief that the criminals had somehow got possession of the special paper used for bank-notes, which it was impossible to imitate without the greatest difficulty. But no! The printing press employed only a few picked men, all highly paid, who were absolutely above suspicion, and extremely anxious to keep their jobs. Moreover, they were searched daily.

"Any changes in the staff?" Kenyon inquired.

"Yes, a man has died, who was inspector here—Tom Jefferies."

"How long ago?"

"Three months."

"Any documents?"

"All in order. Have a look, doctor's certificates, burial certificate, everything. No, you won't find anything here, Mr. Kenyon; besides, it looks as though these frauds were petering out. There has been no new case for the last three days."

That was indeed true. Kenyon admitted it with a sigh and took his leave. Since the robbery of the Dion Bouton Company on Saturday the 26th, the issue of counterfeit coins had stopped as if by magic. And since then three days had passed. Three days! Yes, and in another four he was to redeem his promise.

It was a chastened and dejected Kenyon who on Thursday, May 1st, came to Scotland Yard in search of fresh details, for detective headquarters had, with ironical politeness, placed all their available information at his disposal. With a silent prayer that the powers that be should have sent some fresh clue in the meantime, he

put the usual questions to one of the officials, only to receive the usual reply: "Nothing new, sir." He was just on the point of leaving when the young man called him back.

"Just a moment. Perhaps after all I have something that might be of interest to you, although I do not think it is important myself. The head office of the London County and Westminster Bank in Holborn has notified us that they have found a number of spurious coins among the money paid in regularly by one of their clients, M. Adolphe Lavertisse, who has a curio shop in Southampton Row, No. 138. The bank itself does not attach any importance to this fact, since M. Lavertisse has a substantial account there and has been doing business with them for some time. But perhaps it might lead to something."

"Not very likely," said Kenyon bitterly. "Nothing in this damned business leads anywhere. How long has this Lavertisse been their customer?"

"Two years, I believe."

"Well, I'll look in upon him sometime. Good morning."

KENYON'S mood when he left was if possible worse than when he came. The deuce! What a rotten show! And only twenty-four hours remained in which to solve the mystery.

It did not look as if he would do so! One thing, only, however, seemed certain and that was a speedy end to Mr. Kenyon's career. For his only remaining theory did not seem likely to lead to better results than the others. What on earth was he to make of this Lavertisse? He looked at his watch and finding that it pointed to twelve he decided that it was too early for lunch. For this reason he quickly hailed a taxi and ten minutes later got out in front of M. Lavertisse's shop in Southampton Row. Better not to lose time.

M. Lavertisse's establishment occupied the whole ground floor of the old three-storied house and his artistically dressed show windows exhibited a varied assortment of all kinds of curios. Indian porcelain, old woodcuts by Cruikshank, drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, copper-plate engravings after Lancret and Boucher, Arabian beaten metal-work, a series of grotesque

menus of ten dinners given by the Marquess of Southsee, the baton which had belonged to Leoncavallo, a music book signed by Bizet and another bearing the name Sullivan—these and other things filled the windows in an ingenuous disorder. Right over the entrance there hung a sign with the question, "Do You Collect?" and underneath it the proud answer: "Then there is nothing we cannot procure for you."

Kenyon entered the shop, which just at the moment was empty, though from the adjoining room the sound of two voices could be heard. He was unable to make out what they were saying, but it seemed to him that French was being spoken. The speakers, who appeared excited, conversed in forcible but hushed tones. Suddenly Kenyon was able to catch a word which roused his interest, for it was the word "police." Then the voices came nearer and a moment later two men emerged from the back room, the door of which was hidden by curtains. Both were of about the same height and had black eyes, but while one was clean-shaven and had his black hair carefully parted, the other displayed a luxuriant red mane and his face was adorned by a bushy red mustache.

"A red-haired Frenchman—by Jove!" thought Kenyon. "First time I have ever seen one. It doesn't matter with an Irishman, but Frenchmen are meant to be black-haired. Providence got it fixed that way."

While the two men—the red-haired one was obviously the owner of the shop—were taking leave of each other, Kenyon snapped up another word, "Professor," which seemed to be a nickname, since it was the black-haired who thus addressed the red-haired one. The former then went out, got into the car and drove away, and Kenyon was able to put a few questions to the dealer concerning the false-coinage scandal.

But M. Lavertisse proved uncommunicative. It was true that some fake money had been palmed off on him, but he was unable to trace its source. "To find counterfeit money in the till is the sort of thing that might happen nowadays to any business man," he said curtly. "The police seem powerless against this gang, and nothing has been heard, either, from that young gentleman who challenged them in the *Daily Mail*."

Kenyon blushed and hastened to change

the subject. A few beautiful Japanese prints lay in one corner of the window and he asked that they might be shown to him. He was an enthusiastic collector and decided after a short inspection to purchase the whole set.

"How much are they?" he asked.

"Eighteen pounds, sir, for the nine! Two pounds each."

"Hm! Isn't that rather expensive?"

"No, sir, excuse me, that is not dear, more especially as these prints will increase tremendously in value as time goes on. We only stock first-rate articles, sir."

Although he was feeling sore at the allusion to the *Daily Mail* Kenyon had to admit that the man was right. He took out two ten-pound notes and putting the two pounds change in his pocket, he asked M. Lavertisse to send his purchase to his house. In the meantime, two young men who had the appearance of clerks entered the shop from the street and, nodding to the owner passed into the back room. With a hurried "You'll excuse me, sir," M. Lavertisse followed them.

Kenyon quickly took the opportunity to investigate the premises but, unable to find anything suspicious, hastily peered into the adjacent room through a slit in the draperies. The two young men had heaped up a fair number of gold and silver coins before M. Lavertisse, who was busy entering the amounts in a ledger. "Everything seems to be in order here," said Kenyon to himself with a sigh, and calling out, "Don't forget to send my things," he left the shop.

ONCE in Southampton Row he stopped to review the situation. Of course there was nothing to be found out from M. Lavertisse—that was quite clear; in this confounded affair nothing was to be found out anywhere. What should he do now? Before the afternoon he could expect no answer to the telegrams he had sent to test his latest conjectures. While he was still debating this in his mind, he suddenly caught sight of two people and thereupon came to a quick decision. The one was the black-haired man whom he had just seen, and who was now coming around the corner of Holborn in his car, and drawing up once more before the shop; the other was one of his own helpers, Blair, who was having his boots cleaned at the corner of Sicilian Avenue.

Kenyon promptly crossed the street and made for the latter.

"Blair," he said, "watch this French curiosity shop for an hour and come afterward to the Holborn Restaurant. I am going there to have my lunch. Probably you will have nothing serious to report, but all the same— And, by the by, find out to whom the car belongs that is standing in front of the shop."

WHILE he ate his lunch Kenyon read the *Pall Mall* and the *Westminster Gazette*, an occupation which was hardly calculated to sharpen his appetite. Both papers had a short article on the forgers.

"So far," wrote the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "we have heard nothing of the arrest of the most impudent gang of criminals that England has known for fifty years. They began their activities on April 14 and it is now May 1. Have the police gone to sleep? Is Mr. Kenyon also asleep?" And the cartoon of the *Westminster Gazette* displayed the gang of swindlers laden with heavy bags of false coin—inquiring the price of laurels from Scotland Yard. Kenyon flung the papers aside with a curse as he saw Blair come in.

"I have carried out your orders, sir," the latter said. "Before you had turned the corner, a black-haired gentleman came out of the shop and drove away in the car which you had mentioned. Then three young men, who looked like clerks, crossed the street and also entered the shop. They forgot to shut the door and I crept after them unnoticed. They went straight into the back room. I peered through the curtains and saw them emptying bags of gold and silver in front of a red-haired man, whom I took to be the owner of the shop. The four of them were laughing, but I could not catch what they were saying. The owner entered the amount in a book which he then locked in a secret safe in the left corner of the room. I slipped out before they could discover me. Otherwise nothing much has happened, but I was able to get some information about the motor car. It belongs to Professor Pelotard, 492 Gothenburg Road."

"Thanks, Blair. That's all," said Kenyon. "You can go now."

"Pelotard," he repeated to himself in a

low voice. "Where the devil have I heard that name before?"

He stretched out his hand to put sugar into his coffee, casually casting a glance on the papers before him. On the upturned page of the *Pall Mall Gazette* he was faced by an advertisement which he had seen there for the last two years. "Psychic research" and the absent-minded gentleman with the Shakespeare volume in his hand. He laughed out loud, and skimmed the well-known phrases: "Professor Pelotard—data for big scientific work—acute absent-mindedness—mental disquiet—weakness of memory—a real trial," etc. That was it! How was that? Had not the black-haired man called the red-haired one "Professor," when it should have been the other way round if the owner of the motor-car was Professor Pelotard? Well . . .

Kenyon pulled himself together. It was no use grousing, the quest had to be continued, even if it seemed hopeless. "Is Mr. Kenyon asleep?" he quoted bitterly as he rose to go.

At six o'clock in the evening Kenyon left his office feeling scarcely more cheerful than when he had entered it that morning. He had received only a single answer to his telegrams and that an unimportant one; the situation remained as dark as before. "Confounded rascals!" he muttered wrathfully, and went into a tobacconist's to get a box of "State Express." He flung a gold coin across the counter and had it promptly thrown back at him by the shopkeeper.

"You try it on somebody else," he growled from under a bushy mustache. "I have had too many of that sort."

"You don't mean to say that it isn't a good one?" said Kenyon, taken aback, and inspecting the refused coin.

"Don't I mean it!" bellowed the infuriated shopkeeper. "Do you see that piece of chalk, sir? D'you see what's in it? Quick-silver. Yes, sir! D'you get me, sir? With that I test the coins. When they're genuine it eats into them—but it won't touch the duds."

Kenyon whistled under his breath. Why had no one else thought of this very simple test? Then perhaps half of the cases would have been detected at once, and the culprits would now be safely stowed away behind iron bars. He fished out another sovereign from his pocket. The shopkeeper tested

this also and then rushed from behind the counter.

"That's a bit too thick," he bawled. "Upon my soul, here's one of the blooming gang himself—that's gospel truth. You come with me to the police—right off—got me?"

He had the voice of an infuriated bull. A crowd collected in no time and Kenyon, hot with rage, had to pull out his police card, which he carried about with him on account of the false-coinage affair, before the angry man would let him go. He whistled for a taxi and was obliged to listen in silence to the bantering warnings which were showered on the chauffeur.

"Look out," people yelled on all sides. "Beware of his quids, shover! Some police that, palming off their rotten money on the pore public. Where's the pram when they take a walk?"

But while Kenyon was tearing along in his taxi, suddenly an idea struck him. These were the two sovereigns which had been given to him that morning by M. Lavertisse in exchange for his twenty pounds! He had had no others in his pocket all day. Ha! Ha! So the red-haired Frenchie was after all a deeper customer than he looked. Did he perhaps hold the key to the mystery? A ray of hope shone, bright and dazzling. The next moment, Kenyon had given fresh instructions to the profoundly mistrustful chauffeur, enforcing them by exhibiting his card; and they now tore along the streets in the direction of Holborn. Once only he stopped and that in front of a chemist's where he remained a quarter of an hour—then he continued on his way and on the stroke of seven he got out at 138 Southampton Row, where he ordered the taxi-man to wait. The red-haired shopkeeper was just about to put up the shutters.

"We close at seven, sir," he said somewhat stiffly.

"Please do so," said Kenyon, "and afterward come with me into the shop. I want a talk with you, monsieur."

Reluctantly the man let down the shutters and went into the shop with Kenyon, who bolted the door from the inside.

AT HALF past nine the same evening Kenyon's taxi driver, almost in tears, stood talking to a policeman outside No. 138 Southampton Row. It was now upon two

hours, he said, since the gentleman against whom the crowd had warned him as having false money and who himself pretended to be a bobbie in plain clothes, had gone into the shop. What was he to do? What could he do? They were hard times for a decent taxi driver when the police started diddling people with faked quids. He spat energetically at a lamp post and the constable, who had lent a willing ear to his lament, was on the point of knocking on the door, when it was opened and Kenyon appeared on the threshold with a black-haired gentleman, who was seized with a fit of trembling on beholding the policeman.

"Mr. Kenyon, sir, a constable," he stammered.

"Yes, I see," said Kenyon calmly. "Get into this taxi, Lavertisse. All right, officer, I am Mr. Kenyon, and am working on this counterfeit business. I thought I had found a clue here."

"Nothing doing, sir?"

"No, not exactly," Kenyon answered after a slight pause. Turning to the taxi driver, who had got into his seat, he added, "492 Gothenburg Road, as fast as you can."

At the corner of Euston Road they heard the hoarse cries of paper-venders: "*Star*, extra speshul. Chief of gang as good as arrr-rested. Great news. *Star*, spe-shu-ell."

In a trice Kenyon had stopped the car and got a paper: and while they jolted along the uneven road, he devoured the following sensational article: "Drama in the West End. The Gang at Work Again! Their Chief Almost Arrested! . . . A Hoax? . . . Or the Act of a Madman?"

"Just after going to press we received the following sensational news: At six P. M., as the big West End firms were about to close, a big, white limousine drew up in front of the Dion Bouton general agency in Oxford Street. A portly white-haired gentleman who had been driving, got out and went into the showroom, asking for the manager. The latter was called, but could scarcely believe his eyes, when confronted with his visitor. For the man was no other than the same who, a week earlier, had played the part of Lord Randolph Caxton and thus perpetrated a most daring fraud upon this company. It is easy to imagine the bewilderment of the manager when he

heard himself addressed in the following terms: 'You will excuse me if I tell you that I am not quite satisfied with the car I purchased from you on the 26th, and I am therefore asking you kindly to refund me the £200 according to contract. I have brought the car with me.'

"The gentleman drew from his pocket a paper in which the manager recognized his contract. The sight of this roused him at last from his stupor and with the cry, 'Thief! Hold him!' he pounced on the man. Starting as though extremely astonished, the latter rushed out through the door, and disappeared before the manager or the employees could get hold of him. The Dion Bouton Company are again in possession of their car, and that is all.

"How is this inexplicable episode to be interpreted? Is it the freak of a lunatic? In any case, it is high time that an end be put to the doings of this gang. Once more we ask: Is Scotland Yard asleep? Is Mr. James Kenyon asleep?"

Kenyon was suddenly interrupted in his reading by a distinct chuckle. M. Lavertisse had read the concluding sentences of the article in the *Star* and was giving free vent to his sense of humor. Kenyon shot a glance at him which promptly damped his mirth and then once more reverted to meditation. What was the meaning of this last development? How did the evil-doer dare put his head into the lion's mouth? Was it sheer exuberance—or a challenge, an indication that the circulation of false coinage, which had ceased for a week, was now to be resumed? Decidedly the latter, thought Kenyon, and then "Good-by to Mr. James Kenyon." He had to catch them before the morrow—and that seemed likely, didn't it? Only twelve hours more!

He started, for the car was just stopping before a house of respectable appearance and the taxi man announced 492 Gothenburg Road, in relieved tones. Clutching the arm of M. Lavertisse, whose spirits were drooping again, he passed through the garden gate, after taking a large parcel from the car, and bidding the chauffeur to wait. A maid answered the doorbell, and after a few words he and his companion were ushered into a tastefully furnished library on the ground floor. The Professor was not at home but was expected at any moment.

SCARCELY five minutes had passed when a white car came whizzing through the drive; a young man sprang out, took the steps at a stride and rushed into the study past the servant who was waiting in the hall. "One second, Mary," he called to the girl; "I must telephone."

Kenyon rose from his easy-chair with a grim smile. The new arrival gazed at him blankly and started on perceiving M. Lavertisse. Then he bowed slightly, and said:

"Oh, I see! I have visitors. Why don't you introduce me, Lavertisse? My name is Pelotard, Professor Pelotard."

"I am afraid that *my* name will not sound very welcome to you," the detective said impressively. "I am Detective Kenyon and am engaged in investigating the notorious counterfeit affair."

The Professor's face expressed the utmost satisfaction, as he replied:

"On the contrary, Mr. Kenyon, quite the contrary. You are just the man I wanted to see. I can assure you I was just going to telephone and the person I was about to ring up was none other than yourself. There was a small matter in which I had to choose between Scotland Yard and you, and I gave you the preference."

Kenyon flushed with anger. "Thanks. I regret all the more to have to tell you that I have come to arrest you."

If he had thought to overwhelm the Professor by this announcement he was greatly mistaken. As though he had not heard, the latter meditatively took a whisky bottle and a siphon from a small side table and helped himself to a drink.

"Won't you have one?" he asked Kenyon with cordiality. "Now do! No one knows better than I how arduous and delicate is a detective's calling. I myself have just returned from a similar expedition. It is very exhausting; one scarcely gets time for sleep, Mr. Kenyon."

Kenyon scowled at this malevolent insinuation, but before he could retort the Professor continued:

"So you want to arrest me? And for what reason, pray? I imagined that it was not such a simple matter to arrest people in England."

"I intend to arrest you," shouted Kenyon, whose rage was fanned to red heat by the Professor's imperturbability, "first because

of your fine business at 138 Southampton Row, and secondly because of your connection with the false coiners."

"My little business at 138 Southampton Row," repeated the Professor with a smile. "You want to arrest me because of that? It is rather doubtful whether it would be worth your while, Mr. Kenyon. But your other indictment is more serious. May I ask what is my connection with the false coiners?"

His coolness was at last beginning to tell on Kenyon and he replied in a rather less self-confident tone:

"I am not yet myself quite clear as to that. It is only since this afternoon that I have had my eye on you but I have already made sure of a few things. This morning you planted two false sovereigns on me. And to-night when I examined your cash box I found at least four more."

"That grieves me more than any one else," replied the Professor. "It is dreadful to think of the corruption of our times, Mr. Kenyon! Six pounds in one day, and then you expect a poor business man to make a profit? But, Mr. Kenyon, you must admit that your evidence is a little thin compared with the gravity of your charges?"

"For the time being," the detective said, with an attempt to resume his former overbearing demeanor, "your little swindling concern in Southampton Row is quite sufficient. I have got you there nicely; you may be sure of that, and——"

"Don't get excited," the Professor counseled mildly, "but rather be kind enough to tell me what charges you have to bring against M. Lavertisse's business."

Lavertisse, who till then had sat listening in silence, now started and began to tremble like an aspen leaf, when Kenyon gruffly answered:

"You'll hear that soon enough at the Police Station. And now please to come along. I have got your honorable partner and also your ledgers."

"But you have forgotten the warrants for our arrest," the Professor remarked with a smile.

Kenyon's perplexed face showed that he had hit the mark, and the distracted countenance of M. Lavertisse assumed a more cheerful expression.

"I thought so! The usual omission of a

beginner. You will therefore understand that I am not going with you to the police station just now; but I will tell you something. In spite of your youthful impetuosity, I like you—you really won't have a drink?—and I promise you that I will come with you, if within half an hour I am unable to convince you that you had much better come with me."

"Convince me? By force?" sneered Kenyon.

"Oh, fie! Mr. Kenyon, I was told that you were a brilliant man! My methods are not so crude. Now let's try and get this straight. What is your objection to my business in Southampton Row?"

"What is my objection? Nothing less than that it is the biggest swindle I have come across in the whole of my career."

THE Professor could not suppress a discreet smile, which further infuriated the young detective.

"Though I may not have exercised my profession for very long I am pretty familiar with the criminal history of the country, and never, Professor—I say never—have I seen such a low swindle! Yes, you will excuse me! You advertise in all the papers——"

"Only in the better ones," interrupted the Professor; but Kenyon ran on without taking any notice:

"Yes, by Jove! Haven't I seen your advertisement so many times that I know it by heart? 'Psychic research! Professor Pelotard of Paris is seeking data for his great scientific work, relating to various cases of collector's mania and similar crazes. As it is well known that such tendencies are characterized by acute absent-mindedness, mental worry and weakness of memory, you are asked to state—should you kindly answer this advertisement—how far the above applies to your case. Absolute discretion is guaranteed by Professor Pelotard, who will gratefully acknowledge all information submitted. Professor Pelotard's new psychic treatment prevents or effectually cures——'"

"Your memory does you credit," the Professor at last managed to interject. "Evidently you are in no need of my treatment."

"Your treatment! No thank you," exclaimed Kenyon, and continued his

philippic with growing ardor. "Replies to your advertisement pour in—the postman will confirm this. You receive letters from people who want to see their freaks described in your book, people who wish to try your treatment—or people who are desirous of both. You treat them according to your method, not free of charge——"

"A trifle," murmured the Professor, who was listening politely. "Two guineas per cure."

"THANK you! But that is only by the way. So far you are only a charlatan, like so many others. But your real scheme is more subtle. You have learned that Mr. Jones is as absent-minded as the professor of comic-paper fame, and lives entirely for his collections of China porcelain. You have found out that Mr. Brown is his fellow sufferer and exists solely for his collection of theater programs; that Mr. Smith, whose absent-mindedness is proverbial in Kensington, finds his only interest in collecting Mexican idols or Egyptian mummies. Eventually you treat them according to your new method, but at the same time your agents—I mean those of M. Lavertisse—pounce upon Messrs. Smith, Brown and Jones. To Mr. Smith they take a rare Mexican idol—to Mr. Brown a theater program from the Globe Theater of Shakespeare's time, and to Mr. Jones an exquisite china figure. Smith, Brown and Jones are racked by an irresistible longing to possess these treasures, for your goods are certainly first-rate—your prices also! They cannot make up their minds: to buy, or not to buy, that is the question. By the way, where do you get your curios?"

"Well, one has one's connections," rejoined the Professor, grinning, with a look at Lavertisse.

"I can easily imagine that. Well, my dear Professor, now I will admit that at this point your scheme becomes absolutely unique. While Smith, Brown and Jones are still hesitating, your agent steps in and says: 'Of course we should be delighted to sell the articles on the instalment plan, weekly, monthly, quarterly, just as it suits you, sir.'"

"By instalments," thinks poor Mr. Smith. "That's it." One scarcely notices the expenditure this way and he hastens to clinch the bargain. He may, on the other hand,

pay the whole sum at once, but what does it matter? You don't lose anything by it, for next week the agent is back once more. Sooner or later the client will be caught in your toils. A clever contract is drawn up, he signs—and is lost. For—and you well know it—he is so absent-minded that he scarcely knows whether he got up in the morning, let alone how many times he has paid his instalments. And he says himself that he scarcely notices it. But to make up for it, the agent is not a victim of the modern scourge—absent-mindedness: he turns up with clocklike regularity for payment; and in this way the customer pays for his treasures three, four or five times. In the meanwhile, the agent calls again, bringing with him new treasures, which Smith, Brown and Jones also buy—still on the instalment plan. And you have the face to keep books showing how you are swindling people!"

"One must be businesslike," objected the Professor.

"Certainly, but if it had not been for your books, I should never have got on your trail, my dear Professor! It is through M. Lavertisse, and M. Lavertisse into you! I know now that it was you I saw in your shop this morning. But M. Lavertisse had his wig on rather carelessly this evening and that aroused my suspicions—moreover, a red-haired Frenchman!"

The Professor cast a reproachful glance at Lavertisse and Kenyon, looking thoroughly pleased with his impeachment, added:

"Really, a delightful swindle! You must have made quite a lot out of it."

"Not bad, not bad," answered the Professor with a deprecating wave of the hand; "but just think for a moment, dear Mr. Kenyon, with what losses one has to put up when people pay you with faked money, especially if this happens as often as you assert! Yet what are my peccadilloes in comparison with the gang of false coiners? A mere trifle, I assure you. After all, I have only customers of class, and if they do pay a bit more than they should, they scarcely notice it, as you say yourself. Now that counterfeit business, my dear sir, that's quite different—it spells ruin to the health of business life. And you intend to accuse me of such a thing?"

Before Mr. Kenyon could open his mouth, the Professor added calmly: "My

only connection with the gang is that I traced all its members this afternoon."

KENYON flew out of his chair. "What! You have— Oh, nonsense!" He surveyed the young Frenchman—who by the way, spoke excellent English—with a mixture of mistrust and irony. Notwithstanding, there was something in his expression which almost made him believe the astounding assertion which he had just heard. But no, after all, rubbish! The gang which had for the last three weeks been defying him as well as the British police, traced by this little adventurer? Ridiculous!

The Professor interrupted his musings:

"I am speaking the truth, Mr. Kenyon. And I shall prove it. I was about to ring you up to enable you to arrest these worthies. We may be able to find them before midnight, all where I left them. They are holding their general meeting to-night, for to-morrow they will begin to circulate their money again."

Kenyon went pale: if false coinage again appeared he was lost.

"If you will first telephone and ask for the assistance of six or seven policemen, my offer holds good and you can arrest them. Like the Romans of old, I sacrifice my personal welfare for the State and afterward, therefore, you can arrest me. But it is now past eleven, so you will have to hurry up."

After a quick look at the Professor, Kenyon stepped up to the telephone, rang and gave his orders. While they were waiting for the police, the Professor said:

"I dare say you are wondering how I happened to find them? Quite simply—by closely sifting the lists of my scattered clients. I noticed that I was receiving regular instalments of forged money—or to be accurate, the bank had noticed it—and after a great deal of trouble I was able to trace it as coming from the chief of the gang which has defied you for so long."

"Six days," Kenyon said heatedly.

"I ferreted it out in three," retorted the Professor, and you can imagine my astonishment when this very afternoon the sham Lord Randolph Caxton, the leader of the gang, in what may be termed a paroxysm of absent-mindedness, was about to deliver himself into the hands of Justice! . . . Luckily, he escaped—yes, luckily, Mr. Kenyon, otherwise I should not have

been able to hand him over to you."

Kenyon stared at the Professor, who was smiling gently to himself. A few moments later, the tramp of the policemen was heard outside and all three, the dejected M. Lavertisse, Kenyon and the Professor, went out to meet them.

"Pardon me," the latter called out to the detective in the doorway. "You already seem to have become infected under my roof by the illness which you have just now so fluently described to me—absent-mindedness. You are forgetting your parcel."

"Ah, your ledgers," said Kenyon spitefully. "Thanks, I won't forget them."

"In any case, we have not got far to go," added the Professor.

"I knew it," said Kenyon, proud to be able to play out a trump card. "I had already succeeded in locating the gang somewhere about here."

"Quite right, they have their headquarters in North Vereker Road. And yet they say that you are asleep, Mr. Kenyon."

North Vereker Road proved to be a short street of not more than six private houses. Led by the Professor, they entered the garden of No. 4, on the ground floor of which the windows were lighted.

"Will you permit me a slight illegality?" said the Professor. "I assume all the responsibility. Tell three constables to watch the lighted windows. M. Lavertisse will open the front door for us and we shall lay our hands on the whole gang."

After a short hesitation Kenyon agreed to this. Lavertisse devoted his attention to the lock with the aid of instruments brought by the Professor, and the latter turned to Mr. Kenyon.

"It is no ordinary leader whom they have got there, I assure you. Also I can promise you a little surprise."

"I more or less suspected this," said the detective. "My theory pointed to an extraordinarily experienced metallurgist—in fact, a genius—and moreover some one with the highest technical training, without which no one could produce the alloy for the coins, the paper for the bank-notes—"

"You will soon have the explanation!"

"That's right. I took up this clue and have examined the slender material at my disposal, but the whole matter seemed to lead to a *cul-de-sac*. But now I see that I was perhaps on the right track."

The door swung back under the practised fingers of M. Lavertisse. Kenyon and his constables rushed into the house in the wake of the Professor and Lavertisse. Suddenly Pelotard flung open the door of the dining-room, where a party of eight sat assembled, and turning to Kenyon exclaimed:

"You were right, Mr. Kenyon, this is the leader and these the gentlemen whom you are seeking; and I understand that you hesitated in following up your clue. It is not every day that a gang of coiners has such a captain, and not every captain has such adjutants. May I introduce the man whom the police have been seeking for the last three weeks—Mr. Rufus Chandler, professor at the University of London, member of numerous societies, a candidate for the Nobel prize, a brilliant, if somewhat unbalanced, scholar, a great collector and one of the most absent-minded men in London! So much so that when, in the course of the afternoon, he came across a contract with the Dion Bouton Company and found it initialed R. C. he at once went to Oxford Street and demanded to have his false £200 returned for the car which he had obtained as Randolph Caxton."

UNTIL then a silence as of death had reigned in the room, but at the Professor's last words, a portly white-haired gentleman suddenly jumped up from the table and ran to the window. As if this had broken the spell, the other members of the party sprang up; a wild scuffle ensued in which the police quickly gained the upper hand, while the Professor's voice dominated the tumult, proceeding with his polite introductions:

"May I present Messrs. White, Younge, Hawkins, Burton, Waller and Edwardes, all of them collaborators of Professor Chandler in his last and most illustrious work? Finally, let me introduce the gem of the collection, Mr. Tom Jefferies, formerly employed in the printing press of the Bank of England, who died recently and was buried—both quite legally—but arose from the dead and is now on his way to prison with his colleagues."

Half an hour later, Kenyon, the Professor and Lavertisse left the police in charge of the house, which had hastily been

searched, with the result that sufficient incriminating evidence was found to convict all those concerned. The most up-to-date printing machinery had been discovered in Professor Chandler's laboratory and piles of counterfeit gold, silver and bank-notes lay in the cupboards, waiting to be put into circulation. As for the secret of the alloy that had been used, this was never brought to light, for Professor Chandler took it with him to prison. But altogether the affair was now satisfactorily disposed of and with a sigh of relief Kenyon told himself that he could at last sleep, and with an easy conscience.

When they had regained the street, Kenyon cleared his throat with an effort.

"On considering the matter carefully, Professor, I have come to the conclusion that I am not going to prosecute you with regard to that business in Southampton Row. The idea was so splendid that I am going to keep quiet about it, if you will give me your word of honor that you will refrain from further assaults on the pockets of the absent-minded in this country?"

"Willingly," said the Professor, smiling. "In any case I had decided to give up this business as it meant too much time and trouble. But will you be good enough not to mention my name in connection with to-night's affair? If you will keep the laurels to yourself, you will really be doing me a service."

Kenyon blushed and handed the Professor the parcel he was carrying in his hand.

"Here are your books," he remarked awkwardly.

"Keep them," said the Professor, with another smile. "My books have long since been burnt in Gothenburg Road. I exchanged the parcels for safety's sake before we started on our little expedition."

Kenyon contemplated him cheerfully. "You make me feel respect for France, Professor," he said.

"That's right," said the Professor. "I am French on my mother's side, but otherwise I am a Swede."

"A Swede, by Jove!"

"Yes, and if we meet again, as we easily may, don't call me Professor Pelotard. Call me Mr. Collin."

The second of Mr. Collin's Adventures will be narrated in "The Mystery of the Lost Bullion." Look for it in April EVERYBODY'S, on sale March 15.

Candle Lighter

*Leaving Hardy Adventure and Mystery Tales
Behind, We Make an Excursion Among People
Who Think and Talk of Things Less Strenuous*

By Norma Patterson

Illustration by W. G. Ratterman

THEY sat on the steps with their chins in their hands. Behind them, past the long lighted windows, the class party swung and swayed to Alabama Blues. Before them lay the garden, mysterious and silver with moonlight, and studded with golden stars that were fireflies. But to the two on the steps the wind-blown hedge line was an ocean tossed to meet a dipping sky; and the tiny lanterns that the fireflies carried were beckoning lights of distant ports—all the world over.

"She's making fifty knots," said the mate, casting a proud eye upward at the flying mainsail.

"What light to leeward?" whispered the little skipper, her short curls blowing against his face.

He leaned forward, watching the queer bobbing thing that had appeared abruptly out of the night, and shook his head ominously.

"Might be an ocean tramp, roving the seas with no port in view, manned by desperate men without a country. Afraid to touch shore—always wandering. Get their supplies from passing ships."

"Poor things! If we meet them you'll be kind, won't you? Suppose some day *you* were without home or country, doomed to sail the seas forever."

He accepted this possibility as the highest compliment she could have paid him, and his heart softened.

"We'll see. Look! She draws closer. It may be a derelict with only dead men

in the hold. They say a spirit keeps the lights burning and guides the wheels of those lost ships."

She shivered and moved nearer the protection of his shoulder.

"Afraid?"

But she would not admit it. "The spray is cold."

There was a shout of laughter behind them as half a dozen young people burst through the door. Somebody snapped on the porch lights.

"Oh, look! Jill and Andy spooning on the steps!"

The two rose, grinning sheepishly, blinking in the glare. Music had started. Jill's partner, a husky sophomore, slid across the porch to claim her. Andy, consulting the scrawled back of an envelope, darted away, whistling the tune.

But later, when the young dancers paused to clap for an encore, and Andy found himself standing by Jill, he whispered darkly: "Meet me on deck at eight bells."

And she had to go although she was dancing with Val Westbrook when the fateful hour struck. Other boys might claim her momentarily, but when the first mate called she dropped everything and went. She had done this since she was seven.

She found him standing by the rail, his arms folded, his hat pulled low over his eyes; a solitary figure—lonely and brooding. Knowing that weighty matters occupied his mind, Jill waited with apprehension in her heart.

He flung about dramatically. "To-morrow we leave the ship. When the *Polly* docks at Salamis, be ready. There's work to be done ashore. Are you afraid of anything?"

"Nothing!"

In the dark she felt his approval and a glow of happiness warmed her whole body.

He said: "You have never failed me yet. To-night may be the last time we stand together and watch the heaving waters. If anything happens to me, look in my upper vest pocket. And remember, woman, that if it had been given to this young heart to live, he would have laid the riches of the earth at your feet."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Jill blew out her lamp and sat in the summer darkness brushing her hair. A light burned in Andy's gable bedroom, just across the apple tree, and she knew that while others slept, the first mate bent over his chart, lines of anxiety on his weathered brow. She shivered happily. And then, because she was a woman, she knelt and prayed for him.

"Give him a safe voyage, Lord, all through life. He'll never be anything but a little boy."

IF YOU see life through the heart of a child, twenty-three is not so different from seventeen, and the years that climb up to it are winged and flying, and each goes by with a tune in its heel and a wink in its eye. Also, for those fortunate few who believe in fairies, the miraculous often lies in wait. And so, when Andy Barrett was a gay, light-stepping twenty-three—his ship came for him.

Three years at college and a year spent bending over a drafting table had not changed the old tar, nor had the barnacles been allowed to gather on the sides of the good ship *Polly*. But at the exact moment when Morgan, head of the engineering department, brought the great news to him, Andy was sitting with his feet hooked around the rungs of a high stool, his sleeves above his elbows, his collar off, an unromantic streak of ink across his nose, as firm a fixture here as the waste basket or the water cooler.

Andy heard Morgan out—and sat with his mouth dropped open, his face a perfect blank.

"Well," Morgan's terse voice nudged him, "will you go?"

With a whoop Andy leaped into the air, threw his pencil at the ceiling, and dashed hatless from the room.

Morgan gazed after the cyclone. "The young fool! I don't know yet if he'll go."

But Faulkner, who had known of the impending expedition and who was older and had hoped to be chosen, said quietly:

"He'll go, chief."

Andy found Jill digging among the pansies in the back yard.

"Whoooo-o-o-o-e-e-e! Jill! The company's sending an exploring party abroad—Siberia; China; India. They've asked me to go along. Chosen me! Oh, Jill, I'm going! Snips—the sea—the Orient—the whole bloomin' world!"

There are certain mileposts in the life of a woman by which she pauses and hangs, one by one, the floating perfumed garments of her youth, replacing them with somber ones. Jill lost the first dawn-colored scarf of girlhood here. A momentary panic in her quiet, dark eyes—and then she was dancing all over the place with Andy.

Presently they sat down on the new pansies to talk it over.

He knew the route by heart. Hadn't he and Jill studied the thing for years? (Jill knew it too, but she gave him the happiness of telling it to her.)

"Now say this stick is the Khyber Pass and this piece of glass Calcutta. We'll cut through here. Think of it—actually going! Why on earth didn't they send Faulkner? He's older and he's got a head on him. I've got nothing—except enthusiasm."

Yes, that was it, thought Jill. What chance had a card-index mind against such enthusiasm? Kingdoms are built on enthusiasm. She smiled knowingly.

India receded while he looked into Jill's eyes. There was something about them that had always baffled and mystified Andy.

"You've got a mysterious little face, Jill—like you knew a lot more than you say."

"I do!"

"Wish you could come along, too. It won't be half the fun without my skipper. If you were just a boy!" he groaned.

"Yes—wouldn't that be grand? Perhaps I can join you some day." She could not have the slightest regret slipping in to spoil this big hour of Andy's life.



Her love for Andy had been given her because of these other two who needed love—as
Andy did not; who needed a home, as Andy had not.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

87

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Haven't you got any rich relatives who might die and leave you some money?"

"Nobody except an old uncle who took me to a circus when I was twelve and bought me a hamburger. He's the kind that lasts forever and besides he's got sixteen nieces and nephews to divide it among."

"Well, I'll write you every single thing we do and every place we go. You can trail us on the *Polly*. I doubt if there's a ship afloat that can touch her."

JILL spent the next two weeks making little things to add to Andy's comfort on the great voyage. They were both orphans, raised by relatives, and a strong bond had grown up between them. In childhood Andy had been her playmate, her protector, her storybook. Outwardly Jill had been his devoted, admiring slave; inwardly she was his mother, trying to throw down her love as a soft carpet for Andy to walk upon, so that the journey of this blond-haired boy might always be sweet. She had been too busy and too happy to analyze relationships, but now she saw that life to her had been—just Andy.

Jill watched the days slip past with a little dead feeling growing round her heart. And at last there came a night when the *Polly* made her farewell voyage. Many, many times the first mate had warned her that this might be the last, but when the hour came he had no words.

They stood on the foredeck while the moon-path raced upon the glimmering waters, and a buoy somewhere boomed its hoarse warning, and the outline of strange lands rose—and went past in the night. After a long, long silence she said, and she made it sound a great deal more cheerful than just the words by themselves:

"One of us is getting our dream."

"I wish to heaven it could be both. We've had some fine and merry voyages, and you've always stood by, no matter what the weather. Now I must go it alone. I leave you the *Polly*. Keep the old hull shipshape, and if I can ever send for you, will you come?"

"Any time, anywhere. And you'll always remember to be a good seaman, Andy? Women and children first, and your duty to your ship above everything?"

He promised, very solemnly.

The half hour rang from the courthouse clock. Andy picked up his new suitcase. He smoothed down the front of his new coat. A few loudly beating, hot-throated seconds. Jill put out an impulsive hand, but it dropped before it touched him.

"I can't stand it if you don't come back."

His chin quivered. He managed, "I'll come back."

He put a hand on Jill's shoulder, then he tore himself away, and went gulping and blinking like a boy down the dear, familiar street. He had meant to ask Jill to kiss him good-by, but at the last he couldn't speak without sobbing—out loud; so he had to go without.

Jill waved and waved from the gate, the light from the doorway shining about her. The last he saw was the brave white flutter above the old picket fence.

Like all brave sea-women she kept up till her man was gone. Now she dropped to the ground. She did not know that her aunt came out and spoke to her and tried to comfort her, and presently shook her head sadly and went in, leaving Jill alone with the first sharp grief of her life.

So one of them was taken and one was left. Jill wandered around for a while like a lost soul, and then, out of the vacuum, Andy's letters began to arrive. Some people find reality less splendid than their dream of it. Not so Andy. The world was still a fairy book.

Jill got out the old school atlas that they had pored over together and marked his voyage. Andy tossed on this great ocean; Andy in this little green land. By Thanksgiving he had kissed the Blarney Stone. He held up the whole expedition two days to do it. How like him! From Norway he sent her a little ship upon which he had painted, "*Polly*." Winter in Russia and the subsequent hardships thrilled him as no luxurious passage could have done. And in the spring he stood in the temple of the Wingless Victory, high above the plains of Attica, all the romance of all the centuries crowding about him.

Jill, breathless with excitement, traveled fast at his heels. It was so real that she came back with a start to her aunt's dingy room. Loneliness crept up from the shadowy corners, and from the darkness beyond the window's sill and closed in on her. Andy had thought that *he* wanted to

travel more than she wanted to, but he had only talked about it more.

She consoled herself by thinking: "To want anything this much and to get it would perhaps unbalance a person. So—I'm lucky! You're not the only person with luck, Mr. Andy. And anyway, he'll be home in the fall."

In October the company's expedition came back. Andy was not with them.

He wrote and explained this to Jill:

I've figured it out that a man's life is his own. Why give all this up to come home and spend my days at a drafting table? Look at Faulkner, patient and plodding. After the past glorious year I can't imagine buckling down to it again.

I've fallen in with some press correspondents who are touring out-of-the-beaten-path places. They want me to go along with them. It's a chance that doesn't come to one person in ten thousand. [Andy's luck again!] I'm going as a sort of steno-secretary—not much job but fine companionship and experience, and I'll make enough to cover expenses. That's all I care about.

You know I've always had the wanderlust, Jill, and it grows on a fellow. The end of the world recedes as you approach it. My one regret is I won't see you for many months. I'm in a little shack; rough handmade table and cot; cracker box. Nothing like a woman wants things, and yet I keep seeing you here with me. And you fit! There's the remarkable thing. No other woman on earth could. If I could put you in the canvas chair, and pull the cracker box near—wouldn't we talk, little skipper? To-morrow we'd strike our tents and go up into Egypt. Ah, well, we-can't have everything.

After she had read it, Jill sat so still that a mouse came out on the hearth and ran to and fro unafraid. A little shadow of a fear had crept around her heart—the fear that Andy was going to waste his fine, young life. Instead of saving travel as a reward for work, he would substitute it *for* work. Already he had given up his engineering. The other things—the building, growing, worth-while things of life—would lose their meaning to him. And from a happy-hearted rover, Andy would grow at last into a wanderer, going from country to country, seeking what no land could give him.

She shook herself sharply. What a fussy old woman she was getting to be—a regular Grandma Gibbs! (This was the town croaker.) Andy himself would call Jill that. She who had watched seven pirates walk the plank to their deaths; she who had seen the last mast blow away in a hurricane and had floated for days on a raft, turning out now a fussy old woman. Why not be honest

and admit it? She wanted Andy! All the world was changed without him, all beauty dimmed and frosted over—every pleasure cut in half because he was not here to share it.

She shut her eyes and saw the little shack in Africa and the canvas chair and the cracker box—and Andy. Outside, the strange noises of the jungle; inside, the smoky odor of the lamp mixed with the unforgettable smell of Andy's briar pipe. And "to-morrow we'd strike our tents and go up into Egypt." Ah, if she could!

And then the old uncle died and left Jill six thousand dollars.

ANDY, when his chance came, went wild, but Jill went wilder. You remember that she had had the loneliness without him. She was never to have a clear recollection of that day. Her aunt and the four children floated past her like a big plump cloud and four smaller plump clouds. But the next morning she went up to the city and brought her six thousand dollars home in her hand.

She had a little trouble in the bank about it. The teller had called the cashier, and the cashier in turn resorted to the vice-president. But the tactful convincingness of these three gentlemen was as nothing compared with the urge of a lifetime. Jill wanted her six thousand dollars. She knew exactly what she was going to do with it.

For three days she carried it around in her hand, just to make sure. While her body went through the necessary preliminaries, Jill was already on the high seas. She planned her clothes and wrote to an agency—where she had a personal friend—about a suitable companion. She burnt all her bridges and cut all her cables. There was to be nothing tied to her but one small steamer trunk, and the whole wide world before her.

"I'm coming, Andy," she called across the great space, "I'm coming."

Where would they meet? They must make it Egypt. Everybody was going there now. What would she wear for that first meeting? Something white; Andy would be in white with a boat-shaped hat.

"Good day, Mr. Sheik, will you direct us to the tomb of King Tut?"

Across the wall went camels, caravans, weird processions; the buffet was a pyramid, her uncle's picture the inscrutable sphinx;

the worn rug the River Nile. Hot sands stung her cheeks.

"Happy, skipper?" asked Andy, stooping to look in her face.

For answer she could only smile at him. There had never been in any heart such happiness as hers held. Andy went on explaining, talking, gesturing, his eyes lighted in that dear Andy-way. Now and then he took off the boat-shaped hat and ran a hand through his nice hair.

The lamp burned low and smoked the chimney. The fire died out. Jill put her face in her hands and cried; long, shaking sobs. How had this happened to her? So many people never got one single small wish, and she, who had asked so little of life—who had been content with her make-believe world—had received this!

At the end of those three intoxicating days Jill took her six thousand dollars to Jones's office and bought the old Nelson place.

I think she had known all the while she was going to do it, and that was why she had loved her dream so while she had it. Something stronger than merely gratifying a personal longing had prompted her—that old fear which she had called "Grandma Gibbs fussiness," the fear that Andy would waste his life among the nonessentials; her Andy, who had it in him to do such splendid things.

There was going to come a time when he would grow tired of all that roving and long for an easy-chair before an open fire; for a hammer and a saw and a bag of nails; for a tree to plant and watch gather to itself shade. She knew she would have to wait, but warm winds from over the seas seemed to bring her a message:

"If you keep your candle burning, some day he'll come home to you."

Jill went up to the old house to get ready.

She wrote Andy of her project and waited with her heart in her throat for the first mate's answer. He said:

"If you could understand how travel broadens a person you'd know what you've missed by throwing away your chance. Perhaps you've changed. The old Jill wouldn't have done it."

She managed a wan little smile. "Anyhow, Andy, I—I did it for you."

The blue-china breakfast set went flat that night, but to show that she was a true

daughter of the days when she had faced ring-nosed pirates, and "death before surrender" she sat right down and wrote to this buccaneer of the unbeaten tracks. She wrote him about her chickens, her strawberry patch, the worms on the potato vines ("What shall I do with all these worms, Andy?"); the back screen that needed mending; what she was having for dinner. And:

"If you ever come home you'll recognize the place even at night. I keep a candle burning in the window."

Perhaps she was foolish to pit her little candle against the lights of all the ports, but she believed it would shine to Andy across a world. You see, she had to believe this.

On a wilted, heart-sagging day late in the summer Jill had her reward.

"The boys are coming home," wrote Andy. "One is going to get married. The other wants a private bath—hot and cold. He wants ham and eggs, regular. He yearns to push a button on a wall. So I've decided to come along, too. Look for me some day in October."

Jill had waited two years for that letter, but now as she crushed it to her the time seemed short. "Some day in October." Some day in October! Andy coming home from the office tired and hungry and happy. Andy puttering about the place with his old hammer. She got out the good ship *Polly* and set her proudly above the fireplace. Once more she would be putting to sea. And by and by, when she and Andy were a lot, lot older, they would go on a real voyage. He would take her back over all the places where he had left happy memories about in the continents.

Would he let her know the very day to expect him, or would he surprise her? One more month of waiting; but what is a month when every day of it brought Andy nearer!

IT WAS not until late September that she received another letter—the last she ever had from Andy. Even after she had read it she couldn't believe it, but sat watching the words make riddles of themselves. Pretty soon now they would settle back on the page and say what Andy meant them to say, and not—not this. *Not this*. For Andy wasn't coming back. He wasn't coming back at all. He was settling definitely

in some foreign place. This time it was elephant tusks.

I'd love to see you, Jill [he wrote], keeping house and digging among your flowers. I wonder if you've got the old atlas and if you ever get it out evenings. I can see your eyes shine over it. There were always mysterious things in your eyes, Jill, as if you knew a lot more about me than I knew about myself. Nobody will ever take your place with me. Sometimes I've thought I couldn't stand it here without you. But I shouldn't make you happy—not the man I am now. If I'd never left home—but I've lived a rough life for two years and it tells on a fellow.

This country gets into your blood. I love the strange, unearthly sounds of the jungle at night—the boats coming and going—that element of danger and mystery. But it's no place for a woman. You are home-loving and it's a good thing for your happiness that we found it out in time.

All through the letter Jill had the feeling that she was reading her own obituary, kindly and flattering as obituaries always are. After a time she laid it aside.

"Poor little candle!" said Jill.

In the next yard a child with an armless doll and an infinitesimal blanket was busy at play. The heart fixes on things that the more timid mind never dreams of aspiring to. Jill found herself saying good-by to that child.

In the night, while the winds howled at her chimney and the dead leaves of autumn crackled sharply against the window pane, Jill lay on the floor and beat her hands into the rug. If only she had gone—taken her handful of happiness while she could, met Andy in Egypt for a few gorgeous weeks! They would have been worth a lifetime of loneliness! If only she had gone!

JILL'S house of cards went down that night. But the next day the old Jill of the pirate days swept up the wreckage. "I can't be letting all this place go to waste. What I need is somebody to get my mind off myself, to occupy every speck of my time and keep me flying so fast I'll not have a moment left to think in. Who shall it be?"

Grandma Gibbs! The thought of coupling their fortunes together nearly put Jill into hysterics. The old lady was the town pest. Crippled with rheumatism, she still retained sufficient sprightliness to get from house to house with her perpetual complaints. Friends and neighbors had tried in vain to help her; if they patched her roof she had wanted a new doorstep. If they sent

her flour and bacon, why couldn't it have been sugar and lard? Nothing ever pleased or satisfied her. Jill put on her hat and went after the prize.

But Grandma Gibbs in a pretty room with an easy-chair, and a soft rug, and her breakfast on a tray—was a different person. A sort of astonished docility held her. Jill caught her running a hand over the mahogany furniture, fingering the blue shell cups.

"I've always wanted pretty things, Jilly," she said.

"These are yours, Grandma, as much as they are mine."

The old lady bent her a sharp look. "I wonder why you got me?"

"I needed you."

GRANDMA sat perfectly still for half a day thinking of this. When she came out of her trance a kind of royalty came with her. She went about touching things. "Mine," Jill heard her whispering.

Soon she was helping with the work and digging in the autumn garden. Not a particle of trouble! Jill could have cried with vexation. The days held more thinking places than ever. In desperation she added to her family again. This time she took in the town's bad boy, Red Lomax.

"He'll keep the house in an awful mess, and he'll tear up all his new clothes and track in mud and break the dishes, and chase the cat with the dog, and torment Grandma, and you'll have your hands full at last, Jill."

Red, established in the cozy attic bedroom, tiptoed reverently over Jill's rugs. He was pathetically well behaved and quiet. Hidden away under his mattress Jill found dog-eared volumes of history. She dropped a tear on the well-worn pages and put them back gently. Bad?

"Is anybody really bad?" she puzzled.

By the end of the week Red was milking the cow, feeding the chickens, showing Jill how to drive a nail straight, patching that back screen. He called the old lady "Grammer." And Grammer began at once darning and mending his tattered wardrobe, sewing on buttons. Jill found herself with a happy, grateful little family on her hands where she had planned for tempests! A sweet serenity settled over the old cottage.

Without realizing it she grew interested in them. And one night, with a laugh that was half sob at the queer turn of fate, she gave them her dearest treasure.

She got down the old atlas and the *Polly*. They polished and scrubbed her; they loaded her hull; and when she was ship-shape they turned her nose into the wind and sent the white foam skyward. Jill was her captain. Red preferred to stoke—swinging great shovels of coal into her scarlet, laughing mouth, making her cut sharply through the waters. Grandma went aloft and hauled in the rolling topgallant-sail! Wonderful journeys, so different from the old, spirited voyages and yet—happy.

JILL wrote Andy of her queer household but got no answer. She wrote again and after a few months her letter was returned unclaimed. Jill made a grave that day by the garden wall and buried the good ship *Polly*. With it she buried her childish fancies, her girlhood hopes, the sobered dreams of womanhood. And over the little mound she came to a sort of understanding with life. Her love for Andy had been given her because of these other two who needed love—as Andy did not; who needed a home, as Andy had not. Out of her heart-break she had been able to put happiness into one life so near its beginning, and one that was nearing its close.

For, as spring swung into place, it became more and more evident that Grandma was “failin’ up” as she put it. Her one concern was over the stocking she was knitting for Red.

“If I jest last long enough to turn this knee—the knee’s hard to get, Jilly.”

“Now, Grandma, you’re going to be fine in a few weeks.”

“Don’t you bother about me. All the happiness I’ve ever had, you gave me. It was right nice having it come in a lump at the end.”

She lasted just around the corner of Red’s knee; then she laid her needles down and looked up at Jill and smiled. It was a quizzical, gloating, three-cornered little smile. And Grandma Gibbs’s last words would have been the strangest part of a queer old life—to anybody except Jill.

“Now for a real sail, Jilly; but I wish—Red, come along to stoke her up—and you.”

The house without Grandma was hushed and desolate. Something took possession of Jill that she could not throw off—a fear of the empty rooms, a panic at being left alone. It seemed to her that wherever she planted her heart, devastation went. She kept Red with her constantly, telling him tales of adventure to hold his interest through the long, lonely evenings. But one night, seeing him nod, she felt a pang of conscience and sent him off to bed.

She could not sleep herself. A storm lashed the shingles and tore at the shutters. Jill watched it from the window, then paced the floor. On nights like this, when billows rose into mountains, and buoys moaned their warnings, her heart went out, searching the seas for Andy.

Her eyes fell on the candle. Poor, feeble little spark, holding its light against a storm! Why not blow it out? But the hope that it had grown to symbolize cried, “One more night.” She thought of Andy alone in the jungles; of that last unclaimed letter. His spirit seemed very close to her to-night. Had Andy perhaps— She must not give up to her feelings like this. Trembling, Jill sat down before the fire, and clasped her hands tightly in her lap, struggling for self-control.

BEHIND her a door banged open, letting in the storm. The candle flared and spluttered, filling the place with dancing shadows. Jill, stifling a scream, leaped to her feet.

Andy in drenching oilskins stood in the door.

The candle, dancing over the slick wetness of him, like little licking, welcoming tongues of flame, shone upward to his face—drew a hard line here and a furrow there which changed him entirely from the boy she had loved. Only Andy’s eyes had come back to her—and the message they brought.

Jill did not make a sound. She slipped across the room and into his wet arms.

When they could speak he pointed to the candle. “Skipper, what light to leeward?”

She leaned forward, watching the queer, bobbing thing that had appeared abruptly out of the night. *Then she knew.*

“The lights of home!”

His smile was sudden and sweet. “Drop anchor and reef in the sails. We roam the seas no more.”

A Look into the Future

The Wrath to Come

A Diplomatic Intrigue for America's Very Life—Plot and Counterplot on Board a Yacht in the Mediterranean

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Illustrations by Harley E. Stivers

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

GRANT SLATTERY heard Cleo the dancer, the friend of Count Itash of the Japanese embassy, plainly enough.

"I have changed my mind," she had said. "I have nothing to say to you."

No one, seeing him as he stood by her table in the Carlton at Monte Carlo, could have known that by those few words the dancer had shattered hopes upon which Slattery had built, perhaps, greater expectations than he had ever cherished in his life.

"There is always," he said, "the consolation of champagne! You will not change your mind as to that, also? It is always, for you, tea—and your cigarette?"

"Always!" she said, smiling with something like admiration. "I am constant in most things, monsieur."

Slattery considered her after he had given his order. This girl was not beautiful; she was not, he knew, an exceptional, although she was a good dancer. Yet she was a professional dancer in a place where beauty was, ordinarily, a prime requisite for such a post. She might, he knew, have had a score of lovers. There was about her a curious, exotic fascination, a subtle charm.

And she held in her small head the key to the whole involved and sinister intrigue that was being worked out in Monaco, and at Nice, near by, where the meeting of the Pact of Nations was taking place. He

had come, at her invitation, to learn from her the secrets that she held, secrets she had won, how he did not know, from Itash, who had been unwise enough to rouse her jealousy—and yet wise enough, it seemed, to know how to appease it.

Slattery knew so much—and yet so little! A very rich man, he had resigned from the American diplomatic service some two or three years before—just after Gertrude Butler had jilted him, in Washington, for Prince von Diss of the German embassy.

Since then he had been ostensibly an idler and a globe trotter. In fact, worried by strange hints that had come to him, he had been engaged in unofficial secret-service work.

The world, nearly forty years after the close of the Great War, was at peace. Save for America, all the great nations were leagued in the Pact of Nations, successor of the old league created at Versailles. All, without exception, were leagued in the Conference for the Limitation of Armaments, America among them. Yet, of late, there had been strange rumors of an understanding between Germany and Russia, and possibly Japan, of a plan to attack America—a nation not a member of the Pact, and so not protected by it.

Grant's own countrymen regarded his fears as absurd; one great government, the British Empire, knew that they were not.

Lord Yeovil, its prime minister, and Slatery's dear friend, was even now seeking to induce the Pact to send a final invitation to America to join. Sinister forces were in opposition. Only the night before, very late, Baron Nago, the Japanese delegate, had driven from Nice to tell Lord Yeovil that he had been forced to resign—and had died, suddenly, as he was about to make some further revelation.

Grant knew, or suspected, that the sudden renewal of interest Gertrude von Diss showed in him at Monte Carlo was political. He feared her friend Cornelius Blum, the great German industrial magnate—who was at Monte Carlo. And he feared, too, the effect of Gertrude's appearance upon Susan Yeovil, who had, after three years, awakened the heart Gertrude's defection had so deeply hurt.

Cleo, watching him, spoke, and roused him from his thoughts.

"You are wasting your kindness," she said curtly. "I have nothing to say to you."

"May I ask why? I am here, you remember, at your invitation."

"A woman may—and often does—change her mind. But I will be frank. I have changed mine because Itash—has changed his attitude toward me."

"That sounds like bad news for Yvonne, of the Café de Paris——"

"Pouf! Finished—that one! Yet—I should have killed her."

"Of course, for a patriotic American," he went on, "there are drawbacks to the situation. You were going to explain to me, if I remember rightly, exactly how to save my country from her impending doom, and you were also going to reveal to me various nefarious schemes directed against her."

"Imagination," she declared. "Nothing that I said was true. It was just spite."

"Well, I don't know that it matters much," he observed, sipping his wine. "I didn't believe it, anyhow."

"Why didn't you believe it?" she demanded.

"Because," he told her, "I have had some conversation with Count Itash. I have come to the conclusion that that young man is not a fool."

"So, to put it in plain words——" she suggested.

"I think that you were romancing."

SHE looked at him half mockingly, half in admiration. "Really," she confessed, "I find you, for quite an ordinary person, unusually quick of perception."

"And to be equally honest," he rejoined, "I find you only attractive in so far as you are entirely removed from the commonplace. You are not good-looking enough to be a dancer here. I am not sure that you dance well enough. You just have qualities that go to the ordinary man's head. And therefore shall we have one dance before I make my disappointed way back to the hotel?"

Again there was the beginning of a smile, which she seemed never to finish. They moved away to the music. When the dance was finished, they found their way to two easy-chairs in a far corner of the bar. She looked at him somberly. The smile was no nearer reaching her lips.

"If I were not in love with Sammy," she acknowledged, "I think that I should rather like you."

"A pity about that subjunctive," he sighed. "I am not at all sure that he deserves you."

"If a man really deserved a woman," she said, "it is perfectly certain that the woman would not care for him. That always happens."

"It sounds platitudinous for you," he commented.

"Pooh!" she scoffed. "We all have to be reminded of the things we know best. I am, as you have suggested, plain, dull, altogether ordinary. Yet I have gifts. Sammy, at one time, loved me desperately. If he ceases to love me and puts another in my place, I shall destroy him. At present his passion has returned. He has been very sweet to me for many hours, and so, *Monsieur l'Américain*, let us say good-by. He does not like you and it would do me no good to have him come here and find us together."

Grant rose to his feet and bent low over her fingers.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I do not think that this is the end. You would doubtless prefer, under the circumstances, that I leave the restaurant?"

"It would be to my advantage, in case Sammy should come," she admitted. "If you were with a party of your friends, it would be another matter."

Twice during that hundred yards down to the front, Grant stopped, fancying that he was followed. Each time, if there had been a shadow behind, it faded away. He entered the Casino, which he seldom visited, without exactly knowing why, avoided the Cercle Privé and hung about the tables near the entrance where the strangers visiting Monte Carlo congregate. He drew near a table and threw a louis on his favorite number. It lost the first time. He repeated his stake and won. He turned abruptly around, with his winnings, and was not in the least surprised to find Itash standing behind him.

"You are fortunate," the young man murmured, equably.

"They are a small part of life, these games of chance," Grant replied.

Itash's dark eyes glowed behind their spectacles.

"Listen," he expounded. "If you treat life like a science, to be lived by the directions of the brain, day by day, year by year, decade by decade, then life is a thing that grows dry as dust in the living. It counts only for the hucksters. But if one only realizes, if one treats it as a gamble—a hundred-to-one chance, if you will—then life is entrancing."

"Philosophy on the floor of the Casino," Grant observed, smiling. "You haven't lost all your orientalism, then, in Berlin and London?"

"I have only learnt to value it the more," was the calm reply. "Without it no man can do more than climb to the middle places. In this world, one needs the gambler's chance."

"You'd be a dangerous fellow," Grant remarked, "to be trusted with the whole of your patrimony within these walls."

Itash glanced at his watch and smiled.

"My whole patrimony, my name and my honor," he said, "are already at stake, but it is not the spinning of a wheel which decides my fate. Will you take a little supper with me at the Carlton, Mr. Slattery? I have a friend who waits me there—an acquaintance, also, I believe, of yours."

"With the utmost pleasure. I only came in here because I was bored."

SO THEY climbed the hill and went back to the Carlton. Cleo was still seated alone at her table. She watched the two men enter together, without change of

countenance. Itash was very ceremonious.

"You have, I believe, already met my friend, Mr. Grant Slattery," he ventured.

"I have taken advantage of Mademoiselle's official position here," Grant hastened to intervene. "I have given myself the pleasure of dancing with her."

"In that case, Mademoiselle will permit us to join her," Itash suggested. "But you have wine already upon your table, Cleo! How is that!"

She glanced at the bottle which Grant had left three-quarters filled.

"They come here, these men, after a dance," she explained. "They order wine. The management prefers that I accept."

Itash waved it away impatiently and gave a fresh order. Nevertheless, his eyes were somber.

"Amongst Orientals," he confided, "there is always one trait which survives—the trait of curiosity. Now that I have you here together, tell me, I beg, on what subject did you two converse so earnestly in the corner of the bar there last night—or was it two nights ago?"

"I was endeavoring to persuade Mademoiselle," Grant replied, "that the tango, as a dance, is an incomplete affair. The most perfect dances in the world have been those in which the steps are absolutely registered—the minuet, for instance."

"I was venturing," Cleo murmured, "to disagree with Monsieur."

"It appeared," Itash reflected, "that you took the affair seriously."

"Dancing," Grant remarked, "is the profession of Mademoiselle. It happens to be my chief amusement."

Itash turned upon his guest. His question was asked with rapier-like suddenness.

"Your chief amusement, but not your only one, monsieur?"

"I play golf, I sail my yacht a little, I am an indifferent hand at tennis," Grant acknowledged.

"You have no more serious occupation in life?" Itash demanded incredulously.

"My friends," he told his two companions, "I started life trying to be serious. I was moderately well off. I needed a profession. I embraced diplomacy and then—see what happened to me. I was left seventeen million dollars, the whole of the Van Roorden estate. Well, I confess it, I fell where many a better man has fallen before."

I yielded to the call of wealth. I am an idle man now, for the rest of my days."

Itash himself took the bottle from the ice-pail, filled his own glass and Grant's to the brim. He appeared to have recovered his composure. The shadow of some fear seemed to have passed from him.

"It is what I have been told," he admitted. "Such wealth might dazzle any one. The spending of it might indeed enchain the imagination of the most ambitious on earth. So I drink to your health, Mr. Grant Slattery. I have had a nightmare. It has passed."

They drained their glasses. Itash was himself again. He leaned toward Cleo.

"You will dance with me?" he murmured.

She rose at once. Just then there was the bustle, in the entrance hall, of new arrivals. Gertrude and Arthur Lymane were being ushered in.

THE advantage was distinctly with Grant. His air of hurt reticence was admirably assumed. It chanced that, at the moment of leaving the yacht, Gertrude had confided to him that she had a headache, and was going to bed immediately on her return to the hotel.

"My congratulations upon your speedy recovery," he murmured.

She was mistress of herself at once. She raised her eyebrows very slightly.

"Oh, my headache!" she remarked. "A hot bath and some aspirin disposed of that. Mr. Lymane was a perfect dear and called just as I was wondering whether I should get up and try my luck at the Club, or go to bed. He suggested some supper and a dance here. I am so glad, too, I came. I love this place, and I haven't been here this season. And you? Where are your friends?"

"I came here with the very interesting young man whom I met on the tennis courts," Grant replied. "They tell me that he plays tennis like a pro. Harris, our new secretary, says that he could give me fifteen. In the other walks of life he is to be taken a little differently. His name is Itash and he is, I understand, devoted to the little dancer who sits at his table."

The smile had faded from Gertrude's lips. She was looking into Grant's face as though her eyes would bore their way into the back of his brain.

"I should not have thought that a party of three would be very amusing to you," she remarked.

"The little dancer is only a temporary addition," Grant explained. "I am certainly not making my host jealous, for he takes his protégé away whenever he chooses, and he insisted upon my coming. Still, the position is not without its embarrassments. I am seriously thinking of cultivating one of these young ladies for myself. There is a divine being opposite, with vermilion-colored hair and eyes of the most enchanting shade of blue. I think I had better throw myself upon her mercy."

"Come and sit with us," Gertrude invited shortly.

"Not on any account," was the firm refusal. "I am already a third here. When I leave it will not be to accept a similar place elsewhere. Go and choose your table, you two. I am hurt, but not offended. I will even come and pay my respects later on. But at present, when my friends here have returned, I have an unconquerable desire to introduce myself to the young person with the vermilion hair."

"What shall you say to her?" Gertrude asked.

"I shall say," he confided, "Mademoiselle, I have these few recommendations to your favor: I am an American, as you see me, a millionaire, with a yacht in the harbor, and a check-book which I seldom use. May I have the pleasure of this dance?"

"It sounds interesting," Gertrude admitted. "She will probably refuse you. She will think you have drunk too much wine. Such good fortune would be incredible."

He rose to his feet. "That remains to be seen," he said, taking leave of them with a little bow.

They watched him approach the girl he had pointed out, watched her rise with alacrity to her feet, and dance away with Grant. Gertrude bit her lip as she followed Lymane to a table.

"Monte Carlo," she observed coldly, "is too small a place for these enterprises."

"Life is too short an affair to take notice of them," Lymane rejoined.

They chose their table, ordered wine and danced. Lymane murmured all the time in his companion's ear. Gertrude sometimes listened, sometimes watched the red-haired dancer.

"I wonder whether it is my fancy," she confided to her escort, as they sat down presently; "but it seems to me—I suppose it is because of this Nice conference going on so near—that there is an electrical atmosphere everywhere. I feel as though there were rumblings underneath the earth, as though we were on the brink, all the time, of portentous events."

He smiled indulgently, yet in a slightly superior fashion.

"I don't think that you need be afraid," he said. "I think I can assure you that no cataclysms are imminent at the moment."

"How can you tell?" she asked.

"Well," he pointed out, "for one thing, England, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and Spain, and a number of the smaller powers, are linked hand in hand to preserve the peace of the world. There is no sign of war, no threat of war anywhere. We are all a little jealous of Germany, but industrially she deserves her success. Now, tell me, what form of cataclysm could descend upon the earth to justify your depression?"

"I think," she sighed, sipping her champagne, "that I am afraid of the end of the world."

"The end of the world," he observed, "is but a picturesque fable. The scientists have the matter well in hand. We are likely to have at least a thousand years of warning. My own apprehensions do not extend thus far."

GRANT'S farewell shake of the hand had a particular significance for Mademoiselle with the red hair, whose rent was a little in arrears. She felt the crisp paper in her palm and flashed her thanks across at him.

"This is too good of Monsieur," she murmured. "Because he dances so beautifully he has no need of a lesson. I am always at his disposal."

They separated, Mademoiselle to glance at her note and find her most sanguine hopes more than realized, Grant to rejoin Itash and his imperturbable companion.

"I am in danger here," he declared; "I am of so susceptible a temperament, and *Mademoiselle aux cheveux rouges* has spoken of the loneliness of her life, to me. I think I shall go back to my hotel. The sea air to-day was very invigorating, but it also

makes one incline to sleepiness. Besides, I am like an uneasy spirit to-night. Wherever I descend I find myself the terrible third. What happens to him in French fiction and on the stage, one knows. I think I'll go at once."

Itash smiled, showing his wonderful white teeth. He was more at ease now, and he was not without a sense of humor.

"Fetch Mademoiselle here," he suggested. "She is a very charming young woman and we will make a *partie carrée*. We will see the night through and end it in my rooms with breakfast."

Grant shook his head.

"I am no longer of the age when such things attract," he sighed. "Besides which, I detest an aftermath. The nights which end with bacon and eggs and coffee offend me. I prefer they terminate with the playing of the violin to the door, the bow of the commissionnaire, the little voiture."

"Monsieur has sentiment," Cleo murmured.

"I cling to what remains of it," Grant assured her earnestly. "When sentiment goes, then life is like the dust which the Persian poet tells us about. And so, all you young people, farewell."

He made his bow, collected his hat and coat, and departed. He left the place with the air of a conqueror. He looked back at it, metaphorically shaking his fist.

"This is a sorry triumph," he muttered, as he lit a cigarette. "There is that ass Lymane, gassing away to Gertrude—thank Heaven, he doesn't know much—and Mademoiselle Cleo back again under the thrall, close-lipped, close-tongued, with enough locked up at the back of her brain to make the way easy for all of us."

"Monsieur desires something?" the Commissionnaire asked him, wonderingly.

"Nothing in the world," Grant replied, slipping a five-franc note into his hand. "I am perfectly happy; I am going home to bed."

The man took off his hat and bowed.

"A pleasant repose to Monsieur," he said.

THEY sat in the luncheon-room at Mont Agel, three very hungry but well satisfied beings, Lord Yeovil, Susan and Grant. They sipped their apéritifs and waited for their luncheon.

"The match was a good one," Grant conceded; "but no Prime Minister has a right to hole out like your father, Lady Susan. Affairs of state and all that sort of thing ought to interfere and make him raise his head."

"That putt at the sixteenth was sheer robbery," she agreed.

"An excellent match," Lord Yeovil declared. "Placing you at scratch, Grant, and Susan at twelve, men's handicap, the fact that I was able to halve the match against you would seem to indicate my having played somewhere about six. Six is above my form."

"I think, with the exception of the drive which you sliced from the eighth tee, dad, and which landed in Italy," Susan observed, "you were playing better than six."

"The game has restored my faith in my powers of concentration," her father announced. "I said to myself, all the nations in the world may be at one another's throats to-morrow, my resignation may be demanded before I return to England, I may march out of Downing Street bag and baggage, the day of my return, but I will not take my eye off the ball this morning—and I didn't."

"Plumb in the center every time," Grant agreed. "Hurrah! Here come the hors d'œuvres."

"It is not my custom to drink wine in the middle of the day," Lord Yeovil said; "but I think we must supplement the *vin ordinaire* a little—Montrachet, perhaps, or Château Yquem?"

"THIS is a terrible start to a strenuous day," Grant remarked. "To-night, I dine with Delilah."

Susan looked across the table at him a little curiously.

"I am glad you admit the attraction."

"I never knew any one who knew her and was willing to deny it," Grant rejoined.

"Quite right," his host assented. "Thank Heaven that I am no longer a young man. I fancy that I should find the Princess irresistible."

"When I knew her first," Grant continued, reminiscently, "she was a simple American girl, living upon a farm, riding three hours every day, playing a little tennis, doing a little housekeeping. Then she had a season in Washington. After that

she became the vogue. A town aunt took her up. It was about that time that von Diss fell so desperately in love with her."

"She was a fool to marry him," Lord Yeovil declared. "Even now, after all these years, a German or an Austrian woman finds it difficult to hold her own. In Berlin the aristocracy especially—at any rate until about ten years ago—have had a hideous time."

"There's a reaction going on now," Grant reminded him.

"As we all well know," the older man assented. "Chiefly owing, I honestly believe, to that fascinating youth, Prince Frederick. A most charming lad. I only hope that Lutrecht and our dear friend's husband, von Diss, and the others of that régime, don't get hold of him and spoil him. By the bye, I am breaking my rule, by speaking of such affairs in a public place, and Arthur isn't here to correct me. I wonder why you are not English, Grant? You would have made a wonderful secretary for me."

"I'd rather have been an Englishman than belong to any other race, if I hadn't been an American, sir," Grant answered. "As it is, I am naturally content."

"Au revoir to conversation," his host remarked, watching the approach of their first course. "I now become a glutton. Appetite is, after all, a most entrancing thing."

"During this regrettable silence of my father's," Susan observed as she helped herself from one of the dishes, "you and I had better exchange a few ideas, Grant. You don't seem to have had much time for me, lately."

"Dear Lady Susan," he bemoaned, "the amenities of life have seemed to lie outside the orbit of my jurisdiction the last few days."

"You always pose as being so busy," she scoffed. "What do you do with yourself?"

"Solve bridge problems, inspect my crew on the *Gray Lady*, lose my *mille* or two, drink, eat and sleep. It is a most enthralling existence."

"You seem to have left out a few little things," she remarked. "There's the Princess for instance. I thought that it was rather the object of your life just now to entertain her."

"Others have shared that task with me," he replied. "To-night I dine with her. We shall probably be very sentimental. I shall

ask her whether she is entirely happy with the man she preferred to me. She will sigh and tears will stand in my eyes as I look through the wall. Then shall we part with a little gulp. I may kiss her fingers and she will go and powder her nose, put on a becoming peignoir and listen for the train."

"SOMETHING has happened to you," Susan declared. "You used to not be so sentimental, or so cynical."

"A great deal has happened to me," he agreed. "In three days' time, Lady Susan, if you will trust me so far, I will tell you a most amusing story."

"And in the meantime," she reminded him, a little coldly, "the tears will stand in your eyes, and you will look through the wall, and think of the woman you have loved."

"Those things have to be," he apologized.

"For what purpose?" she demanded. "Where is the necessity? Have you anything to gain, for instance, by flirting with the Princess? Or do you do it to indulge in a sort of sentimental debauch—to go through it and then analyze your feelings? Because——"

She was suddenly silent. She felt, that, in a sense, she had betrayed herself. Her father glanced at her across the table. Grant saved the situation.

"You read me like a book, Lady Susan," he acknowledged. "You always do. As a matter of fact, a passion for diluted psychology of an analytical type stopped my taking honors at Harvard, and will, without a doubt, interfere with my complete success in life. I am hideously curious about little things. Still I offer no apologies. The Princess has stirred colder hearts than mine."

"If I were your age," Lord Yeovil declared, helping himself to the omelet unselfishly, and yet with discretion, "there is nothing in this world which would prevent my being in love with the Princess."

"I am glad that you recognize my difficulties," Grant said gratefully.

"Experience has such a charm for the very young," Susan observed, a little sarcastically.

"After all, it's rather a relief," Grant said, looking round the room, "to be free from this little host of intriguers for an hour or two. Here we are with a crowd of stran-

gers, among whom I only recognize our very excellent friend Baron Funderstrom, the Scandinavian. None of the others are here. I fancy that this atmosphere is a little too bracing for them. We are in a different world. Intrigue up here is unknown—except the intrigue of cutting in."

"Dashed annoying intrigue, too, when it comes off," Lord Yeovil grumbled. "Are you two young people going to play again? Because I tell you frankly that I am not. I'll send the car back for you with pleasure. A nap in my study for the next hour or two is the thing which appeals to me most."

"Just as Lady Susan wishes," Grant said, looking toward her.

"I should like another round, unless it bores you," she decided.

Their final round was played in the brilliant declining sunlight of a perfect Riviera afternoon. The wind had dropped, and brought no longer icy reminiscences from the snow-clad Alps. The air, though keen, was sweet and laden with the fragrance of the trees in blossom, which fringed the slopes of the hills. More than once they paused, to look downward. Susan was, for her, a little listless.

"I don't think you're really enjoying the Riviera this year," he remarked.

"I'm not sure that I am," she admitted. "Somehow or other, from the moment we arrived we seem to have lived in an unfamiliar atmosphere. I can't explain it. Baron Nago's death seemed to be part of it. Dad bluffs most beautifully but he is all the time nervous and on edge. You—although I don't know what you have to do with it all—seem to be living half in this world, and half in some other you won't talk about. Arthur has the air of a man about to commit suicide. The Lancasters are the only normal people, and perhaps that is because they are brainless. What's it all about, Grant? Have you really lost your head about this old sweetheart of yours? And is there really any cause for dad to worry? All these politicians who come to call are so delightfully amiable and polite that one can't realize that they may not be absolutely sincere."

"I'm not going to try and bluff to you, Lady Susan," Grant said seriously. "I'm afraid there may be trouble afoot. We can't quite get to grips with it, but it's there. We have indications of it, and warnings from

all sorts of unsuspected quarters. Personally, I think your father is in a very awkward position. You see the great difficulty is that, however hard he tries, he can't find out exactly how things really do stand. When the Pact was inaugurated, all the nations started trusting one another. They dropped secret treaties and secret understandings and swept the whole of their secret-service departments into the four corners of the world; that is to say, the honest ones did. Consequently, now there's trouble about, we don't know where to turn."

"But you," she protested, "you're out of it all. You're not even English. Why are you so disturbed?"

He smiled as he watched his ball go over a bunker.

"LET it alone, Lady Susan," he begged. "You're the one person outside it all. Stop outside for a time. If the trouble comes you will know of it fast enough."

She was not altogether satisfied.

"Is it my fancy," she asked, "or am I being treated like some one just emerged from the nursery?"

"My dear Lady Susan," he pointed out, "it wouldn't do you a bit of good to be let into your father's worries or mine. And they very likely don't amount to anything after all."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you talk like this to the Princess?" she queried.

He smiled. "I should certainly not tell the Princess the things you are asking me," he assured her.

"I suppose I am a cat," Susan reflected, "but I don't like the Princess."

"You'll like her when you know her better," he ventured.

"I don't want to know her any better," she declared. "She seems to me the sort of woman who makes use of people. That's what I can't help thinking about you and her, and Arthur."

"What use can she make of us?" he questioned.

"She wants to get to know things—for the sake of that husband of hers, I suppose. It's all very well for you, but I do think Arthur ought to be more careful. Father never says much, but I fancy he's thinking a good deal."

They finished the round almost in silence, and their conversation over tea was negligible. On the way down, Grant was conscious of a sudden fear. Susan, after all, was a creature of impulse. These purgatorial days through which he and the others were passing meant nothing to her. She might fail to make allowance for them. She was always surrounded by young men and, for the moment at any rate, she was seriously annoyed with him.

"Lady Susan," he began.

"Mr. Slattery."

"I thought it was generally 'Grant,' " he remonstrated.

"I have heard myself called 'Susan,' " she reminded him.

"Look here, then, Susan," he recommenced. "We seem to have got wrong somehow. I don't like it. I want to be friends."

"My dear man," she protested, "have I shown any signs of quarreling with you?"

"You're annoyed and I don't want you to be."

"Does it really make any difference?" she asked a little bitterly.

"Of course it does."

"Do something to please me then, will you?"

"Anything," he declared, with foolish optimism.

"Don't dine with that von Diss woman to-night."

He was distressed.

"My dear Susan," he expostulated. "I can't get out of it."

"Had you asked her to dine with you or did she invent that on the yacht?"

"She invented it on the yacht," he admitted. "At the same time I accepted it and, to tell you the truth, Susan, for certain reasons, I am really anxious to dine with her."

"The certain reasons being, I suppose, that she may go on making love to you in the flagrant way she did on the yacht."

"Do you mind whether she does or not?"

"Not in the least," she declared untruthfully.

"Then it wouldn't be any use in my asking you——"

She turned toward him suddenly, with a touch of her old manner.

"You can ask me anything you like,

Grant, if only you'll promise not to dine with her to-night."

He was half embarrassed, half amazed. She was, after all, such a child.

"Susan," he begged, "be reasonable."

"What a horrid suggestion!" she scoffed.

"I'll be reasonable when I'm middle-aged—when nothing matters. I'm a very foolish person, of course, but it does happen to matter a good deal to me that you insist upon dining with that woman to-night. To prove how unreasonable I am—*voilà*."

The car had been crawling round the corner of the Square and Susan jumped lightly onto the footpath. She waved her hand to Grant.

"Thanks so much for the game," she said. "I'm going to talk to Bobby and Rose."

She waved her hand once more, and started off to join her friends. Grant stopped his car by the pavement.

"Look here, you can't leave me like that," he protested. "Your father left you in my care."

"Can't help it," she replied. "You were beginning to bore me, so I had to escape."

"But how are you getting out to the Villa?" he asked.

"Bobby will take me. Won't you, Bobby?"

"Rather!" that young man promised. "Push off, Grant! You've had a pretty good innings, old chap. We haven't seen anything of Susan all day. Come along! We'll have mixed vermouths over at the Café de Paris, gamble for half an hour, then we'll get rid of Rose and I'll take you home in a *petite voiture*."

"It's a desperate enterprise, but I accept," she declared. "Good-by, Grant! Hope you enjoy your dinner."

"I shall do my best," he answered with a little unnecessary emphasis.

"WELL!" The monosyllable was suggestive, almost illuminative. Gertrude had paused for a moment on the threshold of the little salon, which she was entering from her bedchamber. Her unexpected visitor, Mr. Cornelius Blum, looked across at her with a deprecating smile.

"I am a monument of apologies, Princess," he said.

"We will take them for granted," she said. "What do you want?"

He glanced at the clock.

"Five minutes' conversation," he begged; "or if, by any fortunate chance, you are disengaged——"

"You know quite well that I am dining with Mr. Slattery," she interrupted.

"I had imagined so. It is about that dinner engagement that I venture to come and see you."

"You will, I trust, avoid impertinence."

"I shall try," he assured her. "Princess, your mission here was a difficult one. So far, you have performed it with much skill."

"I am flattered," she murmured with latent irony.

"I may or may not share your opinion as to Mr. Grant Slattery," he continued, "but in other respects you have done well. I am here to beg you not to spoil the good effect of your work."

"Will you please say what you want, in as few and as plain words as possible?"

"I obey," he answered with a little bow. "You came here to try to solve for us a somewhat vexed question, concerning this young man, Mr. Grant Slattery. You think that you have arrived at the truth concerning him. I am going to be frank with you and tell you that I am not so sure. But I am convinced of one thing—you have gone as far as Otto would approve in your investigations."

"You think that I am likely to lose my head about this man?"

Blum made no reply. She waited for a moment and then glanced toward the clock.

"Otto is my friend," he went on, "and Otto, as you know, is of a very jealous temperament. I think you would be wiser to cancel your dinner engagement for this evening."

"For a clever man," she said deliberately, "I think you are the biggest fool I ever knew."

"I am your husband's friend, and yours," he reminded her quietly.

"Listen," she continued. "Otto sent me here and you know my mission. I shall perform it in just the way I think best. What is to be said about my methods can come from him. You mean well, I think, but anything which you might say would be useless."

"Princess," Mr. Blum remonstrated, "you are a young woman and you have the strong will of your nationality. I am an

elderly man and I claim the right of speaking to you frankly. You are going to spend the evening with a man whom three years ago you treated disgracefully. The instinct for atonement is a very dangerous thing."

"Perhaps," she admitted. "At any rate, I am my own mistress. What I choose to give, I give, and nothing that you can say, no threat that you could utter, would induce me to change."

"Your mind is made up, Princess?"

"My mind is utterly and finally made up."

There was a knock at the door. A messenger from below announced the arrival of a gentleman for Madame la Princesse.

"You may show him up," Gertrude directed.

The man bowed and left the room. Blum looked across at her and frowned.

"You will receive him here, in your salon?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied. "If it pleased me to do so I should dine here. I am responsible to no one for what I may choose to do."

Still he made no movement to depart.

"IT SEEMS to be my hard fate to anger you, Princess," he regretted. "And I can assure you that such is not my desire. Yet this I must tell you, that I am used to men, and watching men; and turning them inside out, judging them from their characters, I have never yet been wrong. This man Slattery is, in my opinion, all that we believe him to be. In my opinion, he is playing a game of his own with you. You think that you have discovered him harmless; you think that his devotion to you is real. You are wrong in both conclusions."

She smiled. At that moment, she was praying that the confidence which her smile was intended to indicate really existed in her heart.

"I think," she declared, "that a woman is the best judge of a man's feeling for her. I may put Mr. Slattery's to the test. If I do, I have no fears."

There was a knock at the door. Grant was ushered in. Gertrude gave him her fingers. He raised them to his lips and turned toward Blum.

"Have no fear," the latter said. "I am an uninvited guest, and I was just taking

my leave. Princess, you will allow me once more to assure you that I never make a mistake."

She laughed a little scornfully.

"The Kingdom of Fools is peopled by the men who never make mistakes," she answered.

The door closed upon Blum. She came a little nearer to Grant.

"What did that fellow want?" he asked.

"To warn me against you."

"What a busybody!"

"He has disappointed me," she remarked.

"I never dreamed that he was the sort of a person who would come and talk to a woman as her husband's friend."

"And how ignorant he showed himself of you and your capacity for resistance!"

"Do you remember the last time you kissed me, Grant?" she asked.

"Perfectly well," he answered. "I stayed with you half an hour after we got back from the opera. I must have delayed your packing, I'm afraid."

He saw her wince, but remained unmoved. He was smiling at her pleasantly, regarding her with genuine admiration.

"You look wonderful to-night, Gertrude," he said.

"Then why don't you want to kiss me?" she asked.

"A psychological problem insoluble before dinner," he assured her with faint irony.

"Then you don't want to?" she persisted.

He leaned forward, took her for a moment in his arms. He kissed her on the eyes, drew her hand through his arm, and turned toward the door.

"Five minutes later and Louis would never forgive me," he said. "He is preparing for us——"

The sentence was never finished. The door was suddenly opened without a knock or any form of warning. A man in traveling clothes, and carrying a small dispatch case, entered.

"OTTO!" Gertrude exclaimed, disengaging her arm from Grant's. "How on earth did you get here—to-night?"

He frowned irritably.

"I sent a telegram," he replied, "you did, perhaps, not receive it. We found a quicker route. May I be presented to this gentleman?"

"It is Mr. Grant Slattery," Gertrude



"Five minutes later and Louis would never forgive me," he said. "He is preparing for us—" The door was suddenly opened without any form of warning.

murmured. "My husband, Prince von Diss."

The two men bowed. Neither extended a hand.

"You can scarcely expect me to bid you welcome very heartily," Grant said, with a secret strain of thanksgiving in his heart. "I was to have had the pleasure of taking your wife out to dinner."

Prince von Diss glanced around him. He had a most unpleasant face, short, fair, mustache carefully trimmed, well-cut features, a wicked mouth, and cold, unpossessing eyes. He was very nearly bald.

"I was not aware, Gertrude," he observed, "that it was your custom to receive your friends in your salon at an hotel of this description."

"I do as I think well in such matters," she answered calmly.

There was a moment's silence. The Prince seemed about to speak but controlled himself with an effort.

"You are probably fatigued with traveling," she continued, "and would prefer to dine here. In that case I can keep my engagement with Mr. Slattery."

"On the contrary, I shall beg of you to break it," the Prince declared, emphatically. "It is a peculiarity of mine, but I do not permit my wife to dine alone with any man so long as I am within reach. I shall hope to have another opportunity of cultivating Mr. Slattery's acquaintance."

"I will provide you with one gladly," Grant answered, without hesitation.

GERTRUDE laid her hand upon his arm. "I do not allow my friends to quarrel with my husband," she said. "I am very sorry indeed about our dinner, Grant. When will you come and see me?"

"Whenever you choose, Gertrude."

"To-morrow at four o'clock, you will take tea with me here. In the meantime I cannot tell you how much I regret our dinner."

Grant was suddenly conscious of the ridiculous side of the situation. He pulled himself together and turned to the new-comer courteously.

"Perhaps you, as well as your wife, would do me the honor of dining?" he suggested. "Dinner is ordered downstairs. Half an hour's delay will be of no consequence."

The Prince bowed coldly. "I thank you

very much, sir," he replied, "but to-night I prefer to dine alone with my wife. I have affairs to attend to. We shall without doubt meet again."

Grant dined alone in a distant corner of the restaurant, somewhat to his own satisfaction, but very much to the disappointment of the *maitre d'hôtel* to whom he had confided his order. Just as he was finishing, Gertrude and her husband entered the room. The latter had changed his clothes but appeared to be in no better humor. He scowled at Grant and ignored his wife. She leaned back in her chair, fanning herself lazily. Her eyes continually sought Grant's. On the way out he paused for a moment at their table. She made a little grimace of apprehension, but Grant only smiled.

"You have made a very greedy man out of me, Princess," he confessed. "I have had to try and eat the dinner I had ordered for two."

"I wish you'd sent me my share," she said. "I have not been consulted about our own, anyway, and I seem to have heard the name of every dish I detest."

Her husband spoke for the first time.

"The marital feast cloy, I am afraid," he sneered.

"I have no doubt but that you are right," Grant assented, with a little bow of farewell. "I'm not married myself, but one seems to discover these things."

He paused, passed out into the hall and stood for a moment smiling to himself. Then, prompted by a sudden impulse, he opened one of the telephone boxes and rang up the Villa Miranda. In a minute or two Susan came to the telephone.

"What on earth do you want?" she inquired. "You ought to be in the middle of your dinner."

"I am supplanted," he replied.

"What do you mean? Arthur?" she asked with some excitement.

"Worse! Her husband! The Prince arrived twelve hours before he was expected. It was most awkward."

"So you haven't dined with her?"

"He refused to let her. Gertrude tried her best but it was quite useless. You should see him, Susan. He's an insufferable little bounder."

"You would have dined with her, then, if he had not arrived?" she asked after a moment's pause.

"Naturally."

"Well, good night."

"Stop a minute," he insisted. "If I came around——"

"Don't come to-night," she interrupted. "Father's going to bed in a few minutes and I'm going round to the Lancasters'. They've some friends in to dance."

"Why didn't they ask me?" he grumbled.

"You're supposed to be engaged," she reminded him. "Good-by."

"Aren't you a little——"

The instrument whirled in his ear. He was disconnected.

"Little cat!" he shouted down the instrument.

But he was too late. There was no reply.

GRANT, who was living on the yacht, had already begun to undress when the sight of the moon through the porthole window brought him up on deck again. He sank into a basket chair, filled his pipe and sat smoking. The gangway which connected the stern of the yacht to the dock had been pulled in and there was no sound of any movement on board. The Casino was in darkness, but the Sporting Club was still brilliantly illuminated, and here and there on the hillside lights shone out from the villas. A sort of violet curtain of twilight seemed to brood over the place.

An automobile with flashing lamps swung around the corner and dashed along the road to Nice. A voiture came down the steep incline toward the harbor. Momentarily curious, Grant watched it. It came along the dockway to within fifty yards of the yacht. Then it stopped. A woman descended and came swiftly along the jetty. The light from an electric standard flashed upon the jewels in her hair as she passed, and Grant sprang suddenly to his feet. He walked hastily toward the stern. The woman had paused, looking at the little chasm of water. She moved out of the shadows and he recognized her.

"Gertrude!" he cried.

"Please let down the gangway," she called out. "I want to come on board."

A sailor on night duty hurried forward. Grant gave a brief order and a gangplank was lowered. It was he, however, who made use of it. He met Gertrude at the shore end and gently led her on one side.

"Gertrude," he told her frankly, "it is

impossible for you to come on board at this hour of the night. Tell me, what has happened?"

She was looking very white and very determined. She put her arm through his and clung to him.

"Grant," she said, "he took me away from you once, and he wasn't altogether honest about it. If you like, you can take me back again."

"My dear Gertrude!" he exclaimed.

"I mean it!" she went on. "I know everything that is in your mind. I don't care. If I am worth having, take me. Otto has brought it upon himself. I think that I dislike him more than any human being upon the earth."

All the time he was leading her back slowly toward the waiting voiture.

"Gertrude," he insisted, "this is not a possibility."

"Why not?" she demanded. "You're your own master. You could steam away to-morrow morning before any one was about. You told me only the other day that you were always ready for an emergency."

"Quite true," he agreed. "But not this emergency."

"He has insulted me," she declared, "and he's insufferable. No self-respecting woman ought to marry a German. She becomes a worse chattel than the plaything of a Mohammedan."

"I am terribly sorry for you," Grant assured her, "but what you are contemplating now would only make matters worse. You must remember this, too: Your husband is a Roman Catholic. He would never divorce you."

She was silent.

"You don't want me?" she muttered.

"Perhaps I don't want you in the spirit in which you have come," he answered gently. "You simply want to revenge yourself upon your husband and you offer me the chance of revenging myself, too. It isn't quite a big enough feeling, Gertrude. The satisfaction of it wouldn't last for the rest of our lives."

"Since when have you learned to preach?" she scoffed.

"A man doesn't need to preach to hesitate about taking another man's wife," he rejoined. "This is just an impulse of yours, Gertrude."

She tried to drag him back toward the gangway.

"Let me come," she begged. "I mean it. I don't care even if he won't divorce me."

"You're not coming," he insisted. "Not to-night, at any rate."

She looked at him with quick suspicion.

"Have you any one else there?" she demanded.

"You know very well that I have not," he answered indignantly. "Adventures of that sort do not appeal to me."

"**V**ERY well," she said. "You won't let me yield to one impulse. You can't prevent my yielding to another. I have a disclosure to make. I came to Monte Carlo to spy on you."

"I knew that quite well," he replied.

"Knew it? How could you?"

"Because the newspaper you showed me with my name on bore the yellow pencil marks of your secret service."

"Well," she went on, "I haven't made much of you; I've learnt more from Arthur Lymane. But I've found out a few things and my people are content with what seem to be trifles. You won't let me give myself away. I'll give them away. They know that Lord Yeovil is going to propose an invitation to America to join the Pact. They'll pretend to acquiesce. In reality they're going to vote against it."

"Three of them, perhaps," Grant interposed quickly. "Which one have they induced to be the fourth?"

"That is what I am going to tell you," she said. "Baron Funderstrom."

"The Scandinavian!" Grant exclaimed.

"It has cost them fifty thousand pounds," she continued, "but they have his promise. Four votes and the motion is lost. Those four are arranged for. Now do you believe that I am in earnest, when I tell you that I hate my husband? Do you still forbid me to come on the yacht?"

"Yes," he answered.

He was standing with his hand upon the rail of the gangplank. She came close to him. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Let me come, Grant," she pleaded. "I will be content just to be cared for as you used to care for me. I don't mind what happens to me. You can hide me away, if you like. You can come back here alone if you want. I won't complain. Only I

must have some one kind to me. Let me come, please."

His arm barred the way.

"Gertrude," he said, "this may hurt but it's best. I care for some one else. I couldn't have you on the yacht. It wouldn't be honest."

"Some one else!" she muttered. "Well, why not?"

She stood away for a moment, on the edge of the dock. She was looking down at the waters of the harbor. He caught her by the arm.

"Gertrude," he asked, "do you think that they will have missed you yet?"

"I don't think so," she answered dully. "They have all been talking in Blum's rooms. Some one else, Grant! Why didn't you tell me?"

"We were both playing a game," he declared. "You were trying to learn my secrets. I was trying to learn yours."

"Who is she?"

"That doesn't matter, does it? I'm not in the least sure of her, or about her; but you see—well, I had to tell you, hadn't I?"

He led her toward the voiture. Even when they reached it she looked longingly back at the yacht.

"It would have been such wonderful freedom," she sighed. "You used to care, Grant. I thought that you used to care quite a great deal."

He handed her into the carriage and tucked the rug around her. The hand which he touched was cold.

"The Hôtel de Paris," he told the man.

She leaned back without another word.

He listened to the horses' hoofs ringing on the hard macadam road. As they turned the corner she waved her hand—a pitiful little salute.

THE spray came flashing back like drops of crystal sunlight from the bows of the *Gray Lady* as she rose and dipped, plowing her way southward in the teeth of a stiff breeze. The rolling blue of the Mediterranean was crested with little white caps. Sometimes the wind lifted the foam bodily from the breaking waves and dashed it like a shower of April rain across the white decks. Susan, holding fast to the rail, tossed her head back to let the wind sweep through her hair.

"It's wonderful, Grant," she exclaimed.

"This is the best day we've had on the *Gray Lady*. The wind's getting up, too, isn't it?"

"It's freshening a little, I think," Grant admitted. "Thank Heaven you're all good sailors."

"Upon me, when sailing," Cornelius Blum declared, "the sea has a pernicious and devastating effect. It gives me appetite, it gives me thirst, it fills me with the joy of life. Yet no sooner do I set my foot upon an ocean steamer, than I am incapacitated. It is amazing!"

"I'm glad you mentioned that—the little matter of thirst," Grant observed, smiling. "It is a long time between afternoon tea and cocktails. We must introduce Baron Funderstrom to my Scotch whisky. Let's go into the smoke room. They've got the fiddles on the table."

Baron Funderstrom, a tall, gloomy man, gray-haired, gray-bearded, gray-visaged, of neutral outlook and tired manners, accepted the invitation without enthusiasm or demur. He drank two whiskies and sodas quite patiently.

"It is good whisky," he pronounced.

"It is wonderful," Blum agreed. "It reminds me of what I used to drink in my younger days."

"It is not so potent as our own," Baron Funderstrom remarked. "One could drink a great deal of this without discomfort."

His eyes were upon the decanter. Grant refilled their glasses.

"Wonderful!" Blum repeated. "Mr. Slaterry, you are the best host in the world. Never shall I forget our first picnic on board this yacht. It is amazing that you should invite us again so soon. Tell me—you will not think I am presuming, I am sure—but our invitation, as I received it, was a little vague. Do we dine on board to-night, or are we to be landed?"

"You dine on board, of course," Grant announced. "If this wind continues, we may not be able to land you until quite late in the evening. However, I think that I can promise that my larder and my cellar will be equal to any demands we can put upon them."

"So far as one can judge," the Scandinavian observed, "they are capable of anything. It is a great thing to own a yacht like this. It's the acme of luxury. Speaking of returning, though, Mr. Slaterry,

you will not forget that we have to leave for Nice at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"That's all right," Grant assured him. "The wind always goes down with the twilight."

"When shall we change our course?" Cornelius Blum inquired, looking out of the porthole.

"Presently. It's pleasanter to make a straight run out."

Prince von Diss swaggered into the smoke room. He seemed smaller than ever in his nautical blue serge, and he was perhaps not quite such a good sailor as the others. He was certainly looking a little pinched.

"Mr. Slaterry," he said, in a loud and important tone, "I have been talking to your navigator. Isn't it almost time we altered our course? We have been out of sight of land for an hour and more."

"I expect Captain Martin knows what he's about," Grant observed, coolly. "Come and try this whisky, Prince; or would you prefer a brandy and soda?"

"I never drink spirits," was the prompt reply. "Wine, if you have any."

"I have some Clicquot—a very excellent year."

"I will drink some Clicquot," Prince von Diss decided.

THEY all sat down again while the steward produced an ice pail. There was a disposition on Blum's part to forget that they had been drinking whisky and soda. Grant managed to slip away. He reached the deck and sat down by Gertrude's side.

"Really," she observed, with her eyes fixed upon the horizon, "we might almost be taking that sea voyage."

He smiled.

"A marvelously favorable wind!"

"Are they all right?" she asked, dropping her voice a little.

"Perfectly contented, so far! They've begun on champagne, now, after whisky and soda. I'm hoping that they may feel like a nap before dinner."

"Champagne!" she murmured. "That's Otto, I'm sure. He never drinks anything else. I don't think, though," she went on, "that you can get him to drink enough to make him sleepy. When do you think the trouble will come?"

"Not until after dinner," Grant assured

her. "I shall set the course a little differently, before then. As soon as it is necessary to get steam up, I shall be sent for down to the engine room."

"Really, life might have been very amusing," she sighed, "if only——"

"It will be amusing enough presently," he interrupted. "I can see that your husband is already in rather an uncertain mood, ready to make trouble at the slightest provocation."

"Our friend the Baron, I should think, will remain perfectly philosophical, especially if he has already touched the fifty thousand pounds," Gertrude declared. "He's the most colorless person I have ever met."

Cornelius Blum came out of the smoking-room and walked toward them. His expression was thoughtful. He stood for a moment watching their course. Then he looked at the sun.

"You'll have a long beat back," he remarked to Grant.

"I shall steam back," the latter told him. "We're sailing now—for one thing because it's so much pleasanter, and the ladies enjoy it so."

"I'm not a nautical man," Blum confessed, "but I presume it would be impossible to get back under canvas?"

"With this wind it would take us at least twenty-four hours," Grant acknowledged. "I don't think we should make it then. Nowadays every yacht of any size has auxiliary power of a sort."

"We would wish to avoid even the appearance of interfering with your arrangements," Blum said, "but you will not forget that our friend Baron Funderstrom is a delegate; that means he must leave for Nice at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"He'll be back before midnight."

"It is rather a pity Lord Yeovil was not able to join us. We should have felt quite safe with him here."

"He and Lymane are hard at it, getting things ready for to-morrow," Grant explained. "It isn't very often he misses a day on the sea. What about a rubber of bridge before dinner? I'll order a table."

He strolled away. Blum turned toward Gertrude. He looked at her for a moment thoughtfully.

"Has anything about this cruise struck you as being in any way peculiar?" he asked.

"Why, no!" she replied. "It all seems very pleasant. Mr. Slattery is a wonderful host."

"Marvelous!" he assented. "Still, I don't quite see why he's standing such a long way out or why he was so particularly anxious to have Funderstrom as a guest. Funderstrom is not an attractive man."

"As a matter of fact, it was I who suggested him. He'd spoken about loving the water. I suppose Mr. Slattery was trying to be civil."

"It was you who suggested him?" Blum repeated thoughtfully. "Ah, well, we shall see. I expect I'm being very foolish. We shall soon know."

"I don't know about being foolish, but you're very mysterious," Gertrude said.

"It is because I am on the scent of a mystery," he replied. "A crude mystery, a clumsy affair, without a doubt—but still a mystery. We shall see."

It was a significant fact to Cornelius Blum that cocktails were introduced before the accustomed time and pressed upon every one to the limit of hospitality. Grant himself, who was as a rule extremely moderate, set an example by drinking one every time they came round, and when they descended into the salon for dinner, there were magnums of champagne upon the table.

"When we get on deck after dinner," he announced, "we shall be headed for the land and under steam."

"At what time do you propose to get rid of us?" Gertrude asked.

"In time for a final flutter at the Casino, if you're keen about it," he assured her.

THE service of dinner proceeded. The wine circulated; conversation, which had languished at first, soon became gay, even uproarious. Cornelius Blum alone was scarcely in his usual spirits. He looked often out of the porthole; more than once he glanced at the clock.

"What about the course, now?" he asked his host once.

"We are round by this time," Grant answered. "You'll hear the engines directly."

Another half hour passed, however, and the engines remained silent. Then one of the junior officers came in and whispered in Grant's ear. He laid down his table napkin.

"May I be excused for a moment?" he

begged. "A matter of etiquette. My engineer has always to consult me. A perfect bluff, of course."

He was gone about ten minutes. When he came back they all looked at him a little curiously. It was Gertrude who became spokesman.

"Is anything wrong, Grant?" she asked. "We're not going to be shipwrecked or anything, are we?"

"Not a chance of it," he assured her. "I wish there were. I'd show you what an Admirable Crichton I should make. As a matter of fact, there's a little trouble with one of the pistons. We may not be able to get going for an hour or so."

There was a brief silence. Then Susan laughed gaily.

"What fun! Shall we have to sleep on board?"

"Oh, it's not so serious as that!" was his cheerful reply. "If you do, though, I fancy we can manage to make you comfortable. Bad luck, it's a head wind or we could beat in. We're gaining a little all the time, as it is."

Baron Funderstrom finished his glass of champagne and looked to see if there was any more in the nearest bottle.

"There will be no doubt, I trust, about my being landed in time to get to Nice tomorrow?" he inquired.

"Not the slightest," Grant promised, making a sign to the steward. "Now, gentlemen, we must just finish this champagne. Then I'm going to introduce you to my Madeira. Vintage port I can't offer you, but my Madeira—well, I bought it on the island myself, and I believe there is nothing else quite like it."

They sat for the better part of an hour round the table. The women went out on deck, but Susan soon returned in glistening oilskins.

"Dark as pitch," she declared, "and little spits of rain all the time. Really, Mr. Host, you do provide us with lots of variety, even in the way of weather."

Grant rose to his feet.

"We'll have a look round," he proposed. "I thought we should have heard the engine before now."

They trooped out on deck. One of the stewards was busy handing out oilskins and sou'westers. They walked up and down for a moment or two. There were no lights in

sight, and they seemed to be doing little more than drift.

"I'll go and have a talk with Captain Martin," Grant suggested. "Perhaps I'd better look down below, first, though, and see what Henderson can arrange in case we have to give you shakedowns."

"I'd like to go with you," Cornelius Blum, who had been curiously silent for some time, proposed. "Which way are your quarters?"

Grant led them along the oak-paneled passage and threw open the door of his own little suite. Blum, who was following close behind, suddenly pushed against him, so heavily that Grant slipped. The Prince, who had joined them on the stairs, slammed the door. Grant felt the cold pressure of a pistol against his forehead.

"If you utter a sound," Blum threatened, "as sure as I'm a living man, you'll be a dead one. Hold up your hands, and back away there."

Grant held up one hand, and stooped and picked up a cigar with the other.

"I give you my word of honor that I am not armed," he said, "and I haven't the faintest intention of quarreling with a man who is. Now what's it all about?"

"Will you give the order to start your engines?" Blum demanded.

"I'll see you damned first," was the emphatic reply.

CAPTAIN MARTIN and Chief Engineer Nicholson were smoking a pipe together in the latter's very comfortable but somewhat out-of-the-way quarters when, to their surprise, the door of the cabin was abruptly opened to admit two of the ship's guests, Cornelius Blum and Baron Funderstrom.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the captain said, in some surprise.

"We want to know, Mr. Engineer, what is wrong with your engines? Why can't you start up and get us back to Monte Carlo?"

"My engines? Who said there was anything wrong with my engines?" Nicholson asked.

"Mr. Slattery has told us so," was the curt reply. "He told us not a quarter of an hour ago that you were afraid to start them for fear of an accident to one of the pistons."

"Well, if Mr. Slattery said so," the chief engineer observed, "he's doubtless right."

"I do not believe it," Blum declared. "We have reason to suspect that Mr. Slattery is trying to keep us out here all night for a purpose of his own."

"If you think that, it's Mr. Slattery you'd better talk to, sir," Nicholson suggested. "My job on board this boat is to take orders from the owner. You'd better go and complain to Mr. Slattery, if there's anything not to your liking."

"We have complained to Mr. Slattery," Blum rejoined. "He has refused to order you to start your engines."

"Then that's all there is to be said about it," the captain intervened. "They will start all right as soon as Mr. Slattery says the word, and not before."

Cornelius Blum's hand left his hip pocket. He was a good judge of men, and he realized that threats were not likely to help him.

"Look here," he said. "You two are sensible men. I'm sure of that. I want to tell you that Mr. Slattery is playing a very dangerous game. He is pretending to be broken down to keep this gentleman, Baron Funderstrom, from attending the Nice Conference to-morrow."

"Aye, aye," the engineer observed. "He has some good reason, no doubt."

"I am not going to threaten you with what may happen if this conspiracy is persisted in," Blum went on. "I want to put the matter to you another way. Start your engines and get us into Monte Carlo before morning, and you shall have a draft for five thousand pounds, during the day."

"Five thousand pounds," the captain echoed.

"It's an enormous sum," the engineer said, reflectively.

"It is yours, if you'll do as I have asked," Blum assured them.

"What's the matter with Mr. Slattery giving me my orders?" Nicholson demanded.

"Mr. Slattery has already given you his orders, and we don't approve of them," Blum replied.

"It's a pity, that," the chief engineer regretted, "for Mr. Slattery's are the only orders that are likely to receive any attention on board this ship."

"If to that five, I were to add another two?" Blum suggested.

"Seven thousand pounds! Why, man

alive! It's a tremendous sum," the other said. "I'd not know what to do with such a fortune."

"That is for you to decide," Blum said impatiently. "You can make your own arrangements with the captain. All we ask of you is to start your engines, and of the captain to take us into Monte Carlo. Come! This shall mean your fortunes, both of you! It shall be ten thousand pounds between you, paid in cash to-morrow morning."

"Ten thousand pounds!" the engineer repeated. "Did you hear that, Captain Martin? Five thousand apiece! Why, mon, the money would be a temptation to us. Like as not, we would stay on land and get drunk, instead of coming to sea, like decent seafaring men should."

"Will you do it, or won't you?" Blum demanded, suddenly suspicious of the other's attitude.

The chief engineer knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"I'M THINKING," he said, "that neither of you gentlemen are used to the sea, and the ways of seafaring folks, or you'd know that there isn't a self-respecting officer born who'd take his orders from any except his owner. You're simply wasting your time here, gentlemen. If you'll excuse me, I'll be getting along. I've a fancy for a word with Mr. Slattery."

"You'll stay here for the present," Blum declared coolly. "Don't make a fuss about it, please. No one wants to hurt you, but there's a great deal at stake, and a few men's lives won't make much difference."

The engineer looked in blank and genuine amazement down the black muzzle of an automatic.

"Take your fingers off that trigger, you blithering idiot," he shouted. "Don't you know it might go off at any minute?"

"It's very likely indeed to go off if you move," Blum assured him. "Just as you are, please, both of you."

Baron Funderstrom stepped backward, and Blum followed his example. Outside, they shut the door and locked it. The two officers stared at one another open-mouthed.

"So that's the game!" the engineer exclaimed. "We're keeping that warmed-up corpse of a lop-eared German from going to the Conference. Abductors! That's what we are."

The captain helped himself to soda and whisky and passed the decanter.

"Fill up, Jim," he invited, "and then you'd better press the bell."

"The fat chump wasn't quite such a flat as all that," Nicholson remarked. "Wire's cut outside."

Captain Martin leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"If this doesn't beat the band!" he exclaimed. "I that have been going to sea for thirty years and have never been in a hold-up before! Drink up, Jim, and we'll get busy. There must be something we can do!"

The chief mate, Henry Fosbrooke, was standing, his back to the rail, watching the erratic antics of an uncertain wind in his mainsail. The yacht being for a watch under his control he was indulging in some mild speculation as to the reason for the curious instructions he had received. To him, out of the gloom, came Blum, bulky, ponderous, slow-footed, followed by Funderstrom, gray and cold, silent as a dead man.

"Are you the officer in charge?" Blum asked.

"I am, sir," was the civil reply. "We're giving you a queer sort of entertainment, to-night."

"My friend here, Baron Funderstrom, and I are the victims of a practical joke," Blum continued. "We have a proposition to make to you."

"A proposition!" the officer repeated, watching the slow bellying of his sail. "If it is anything to do with getting busy down in the engine room, I shall be glad to hear it, anyhow. I don't fancy this flopping about like a lame duck, with squalls in the offing."

"To tell you the truth, neither do we," Blum declared. "We want to turn the tables upon Mr. Slattery. Is there a second engineer on board?"

"There he is, sir," the mate answered, pointing to a gloomy figure standing with his hands in his pockets a few yards away.

"I should like to speak to him for a moment. Please call him."

The appearance of the second engineer, who at once obeyed the summons, was distinctly encouraging. He was a youngish man with shifty eyes and a furtive manner.

"Would five thousand pounds apiece be of any use to you young fellows?" Blum asked, addressing them both.

Neither of them answered. They could only stare.

"GET down to your engine room, start up and head this yacht back for Monte Carlo," Blum continued, "and the money is yours."

"Without Mr. Slattery's orders?" the officer of the watch gasped.

"Mr. Slattery, at the moment, is not in a position to give orders," was the terse reply.

"What about my chief?" the engineer demanded.

"He is in the same position. You have the run of the ship for a time. Do as I say and I swear before God you shall have the money."

"The devil!" the mate exclaimed. "I thought there was some queer work afoot. What's wrong with Mr. Slattery?"

"Nothing serious," Blum assured them. "I have locked him up. He is trying to play a trick on us. It is perfectly fair and just to defend ourselves. He is endeavoring to keep us from making land before dawn. We are determined to get there, somehow or other. It is five thousand apiece. There's some fun to be got in the world for five thousand pounds, you know."

"I'm on, anyway," the second engineer decided. "We can't be getting any one into bad trouble."

"You will not be getting any one into trouble at all," Blum declared. "My friend here is Baron Funderstrom, Scandinavian delegate at the Nice Conference. All Mr. Slattery is trying to do is prevent his attending the meeting to-morrow morning, for political reasons. We intend that he shall be there."

"But what's become of my chief?" the young engineer asked, anxiously.

"Locked up in his room," was the blunt reply, "and the captain with him. That can't last long, I know, but it won't take us very long, either, to get back to Monaco with a full head of steam on."

"All right," the officer of the watch announced. "I'll take her in charge. We've scarcely any sail on her now. We'll get rid of that directly. Five thousand pounds each, mind."

"It is a bargain," Blum assured them.

They disappeared in different directions. Blum, followed by Funderstrom, his silent and almost ghostly shadow, strolled along

the deck. Away aft Rose Lancaster and her brother, Susan and Gertrude, were still laughing and talking. Susan looked up as they approached.

"Where's every one?" she asked curiously. "They all seem to have gone to sleep."

"Where is Mr. Slattery?" Gertrude demanded. "And what have you done with my husband?"

"They are all trying to solve the problem of this slight breakdown," Blum explained. "It seems to be a more intricate affair than we thought."

"I don't care when we get home," Susan declared recklessly. "I've been to look at the cabins downstairs, and I never dreamed of such luxury in my life."

"Odd thing about Slattery, though," Lancaster observed. "Is he down in the engine room?"

"I left him there," Blum told them. "Like every owner, I believe he fancies that his presence encourages his men."

"By Jove, it has, too!" the young man exclaimed. "Can't you hear? The engine's started."

There was a chorus of exclamations. Susan rose from her place and glided unnoticed to the other side of the deck.

She passed unseen down the companion-way, and into the saloon. A single steward was there, busy at the sideboard.

"Where are all the others?" she inquired.

"They are having supper, your ladyship."

"Do you know where Mr. Slattery is?"

"He is in his room with another gentleman."

Susan hesitated for a moment and then continued on her passage through the saloon. The man deferently but effectively barred the way.

"If your ladyship will excuse me," he said, "Mr. Slattery gave instructions that he was not to be disturbed."

"You're telling me a lie," she answered promptly. "Mr. Slattery gave no such orders."

The man faltered. "Well, the gentleman with him gave the orders, your ladyship."

"That isn't at all the same thing," Susan declared. "Stand aside, please."

THE man hesitated. He was a somewhat undersized person, and Susan just then felt herself possessed with the strength of half a dozen such. She swept

him to one side and passed along the passage beyond the saloon. At the second door, which she knew to be Grant's, she paused, knocked in vain, and then tried the handle.

"Who is there?" Grant's voice inquired.

"Curse you, shut up," von Diss muttered angrily.

"Grant, is anything wrong?" Susan called out.

"A great deal," he answered, "and you seem to have been the only one with common sense enough to find it out! Can you get hold of Captain Martin and tell him there is a mutiny on the ship? I'm locked in here."

The door opened stealthily. A hand flashed out and caught her by the wrist. She felt herself being dragged into the room. And then pandemonium broke loose. The sudden opening of the door showed her what had happened. Grant, lounging on his bunk, covered by von Diss's weapon, took advantage of that sudden turn to make the spring he had been contemplating for some time. Von Diss's right arm was knocked up by a cruel undercut; one barrel of the pistol went off harmlessly into the wall. With the other hand, Grant struck him on the side of the head. He collapsed with barely a groan, half on the floor and half on the sofa. Grant stooped and picked up the pistol.

"Bless you, my child!" he said to Susan, who was standing on the threshold, amazed but unshaken.

"What does it all mean?" she demanded wonderingly.

"Oh, we asked for trouble, all right," he admitted. "We're abductors, pirates, whatever you like. I don't blame these chaps for not taking it lying down. But I think they might have put up a better fight. Now let's get on deck. I want to find out who the mischief gave orders to start the engine."

"What about him?" she asked, pointing to the floor where von Diss lay moaning and half conscious.

"I'll send a steward down," Grant promised. "He's got lots of nerve, I will say that for him. He had me covered and his hand was like a rock. He'd have shot me all right if I'd moved. He made the mistake of his life when he took his eye off me, to drag you in. Now we'll have to see about those engines."

She slipped her arm through his. They made their way through the deserted saloon, up the companionway, and out on to the weather side of the deck. A young officer came along, smoking a cigarette. He saluted as Grant spoke to him.

"Who's on the bridge, Simpson?"

"Fosbrooke, sir. It's my relief but he preferred to go on for another half hour. Said he had some special orders."

"What's our course?"

"Almost due north, sir," the youth answered. "We shall fetch Monaco in about two hours."

Grant nodded and walked forward to the steps leading to the bridge. The lookout stood behind the white canvas. A solitary figure was pacing back and forth.

"Stay here," Grant whispered. "There's probably some one else lurking about to see this fellow isn't interfered with."

"Not I," she insisted. "I'm coming up with you. You haven't another pistol, have you?"

"No, but you can have this one," he answered, pushing it into her hand. "They won't suspect your having one and I'm pretty useful with my fists. Got it? Good! Now, go around the other side and tell Gertrude to look after her husband. See what's doing, and then come forward. I can't think what's become of Martin and the chief engineer."

She nodded and glided away, through the darkness. Her slippered feet were noiseless upon the deck, and in her black gown she was almost invisible. Grant climbed the steps rapidly. There was no sign of any unauthorized person upon the bridge. The words of stern inquiry were already framed upon his lips. Then, just as he stood on the last step, something swung out from behind the canvas protection. He felt a crushing blow on the side of his head, followed by a sensation of darkness. He fell down the steps, and collapsed on the deck below. Cornelius Blum, an ugly block of wood still in his hand, peered over and looked at him.

"A pity!" he muttered. "I hate violence."

The seaman had turned around from his shelter on the bridge. He glanced anxiously toward the officer in charge.

"What's going on here, sir?" he asked.

"Only one of the commander's guests, ran amuck," was the answer. "Had too much to drink and wanted to come and sail

the ship. Get back to your post, Burgess."

The man looked uneasily below. He was not at all satisfied.

"Seems to me they've treated him a bit roughly, sir," he said.

"Not our job."

"Hadn't I better go down and have a look at him?" he persisted.

"Stay where you are, damn you," was the angry reply. "We're doing twenty-six knots with a cloud of rain ahead, and thirty fishing boats somewhere about. Attend to your job."

THERE was a certain irony about Susan's reappearance aft. Grant's string quartet had begun to play soft music. Funderstrom had rejoined the little group and was sitting upon the outskirts, cold and silent as ever. Gertrude and Rose were listening to the music, but the latter was clearly uneasy. She welcomed Susan eagerly.

"Susan, where is everybody?" she exclaimed. "I never knew anything so mysterious. Mr. Slattery hasn't been back all the time. Prince von Diss has disappeared, and now even Mr. Blum has deserted us."

"I suppose it's the trouble about the engines," Susan observed. "I don't think there's anything to be alarmed at, though. The sea's quite calm, even if we do break down."

Mr. Cornelius Blum suddenly came into evidence. He stepped through the companionway with the obvious air of having something to say.

"There is no cause for alarm," he assured them; "the whole affair is a mere trifle but Mr. Slattery has met with a slight accident. He seems to have slipped coming down the steps from the bridge. We've taken him into the saloon. If one of you ladies who is accustomed to bandaging——"

Gertrude and Susan both rose to their feet. Susan, however, was half-way down the stairs before the others had started. Grant was lying upon a sofa, and a steward was bathing his forehead. He looked up as Susan entered. She hurried over to his side and waved the steward away.

"Are you hurt, Grant?" she whispered eagerly.

"Not I," he answered. "I'm making the worst of it, but I shall be all right in half an hour. It's a fair enough fight, Susan, but these fellows are in earnest, especially

Blum. Look here, Nicholson and Martin must be locked up in the chief engineer's quarters. All the bells are cut, but the captain's boy is certain to find them within half an hour. The worst of it is, we shall be in sight of Monaco in an hour or so if they keep this speed up."

"They shan't," she declared. "Tell me. Who's my man? Where shall I go—the engine room, or the bridge?"

Grant smiled. "Bravo, child," he muttered. "Look out! They're coming. The bridge."

Susan turned away with a little shiver of excitement. Gertrude, who had just hurried in, knelt down by Grant's side and called to the steward.

"Some more hot water and lint," she directed. "Some disinfectant, if you have it, and a sponge. Please leave this to me, all of you. I'm used to bandaging but I hate to have too many people round."

Susan left the saloon stealthily and made her way back on deck. She walked up the lee side and climbed the stairs down which Grant had been thrown. The officer in charge was standing, looking steadily at a light far ahead. He suddenly felt a touch on his arm and turned round with a start to find Susan by his side.

"Do you mind my talking to you for a minute," she whispered. "We're all so scared—so afraid that we're going to break down, or something."

"We're quite all right," the young man declared, a little thickly.

"Shall we get back to Monaco to-night?"

"In about two hours' time. We shall see the lights presently."

"What is our course just now, then?" she inquired.

"Almost due north," he replied. "There's just a point or two of east in it. You'd better get down, your ladyship. Mr. Slattery doesn't allow any one on the bridge unless he brings them here himself."

She edged a little away from him.

"Where do you give your orders to the engine room?" she asked.

He pointed to the chart house behind. She nodded.

"I have brought you a message from Mr. Slattery," she said.

He looked at her suspiciously. There was something stealthy and guarded in her attitude. The wind was blowing her hair back

from her face. It was a very strong, capable face—a stronger face than his own. Her eyes, too—soft and brown, but compelling—seemed to hold him.

"Mr. Slattery's message," she went on, "is that you alter the course to due south. It is his wish to go no nearer to Monaco. Will you please ring down to the engine room at once and reverse your course?"

"I can't do that, your ladyship," he declared. "I have my orders, I must stick to them."

"And I have mine," she said, "from Mr. Slattery. I have never broken my word in my life and you can take this from me, just as though I were a man. I'm not going to risk killing you outright, but I'm going to shoot you first through one leg and then through the other, unless you do as you're ordered!"

"Pooh! Don't be silly!" he exclaimed, moving toward her. "I'm twice as quick as you are, and a good deal more used to firearms."

"Quick, I say!"

THE muzzle of her pistol gleamed wickedly in the light which shone from the chart room. The young man stood and looked ahead of him miserably.

"What a night!" he groaned.

"I can't wait," she declared. "We might be interrupted. Get into the room and ring down at once. If you don't I swear I will keep my word. I will keep it before I count five. One, two, three——"

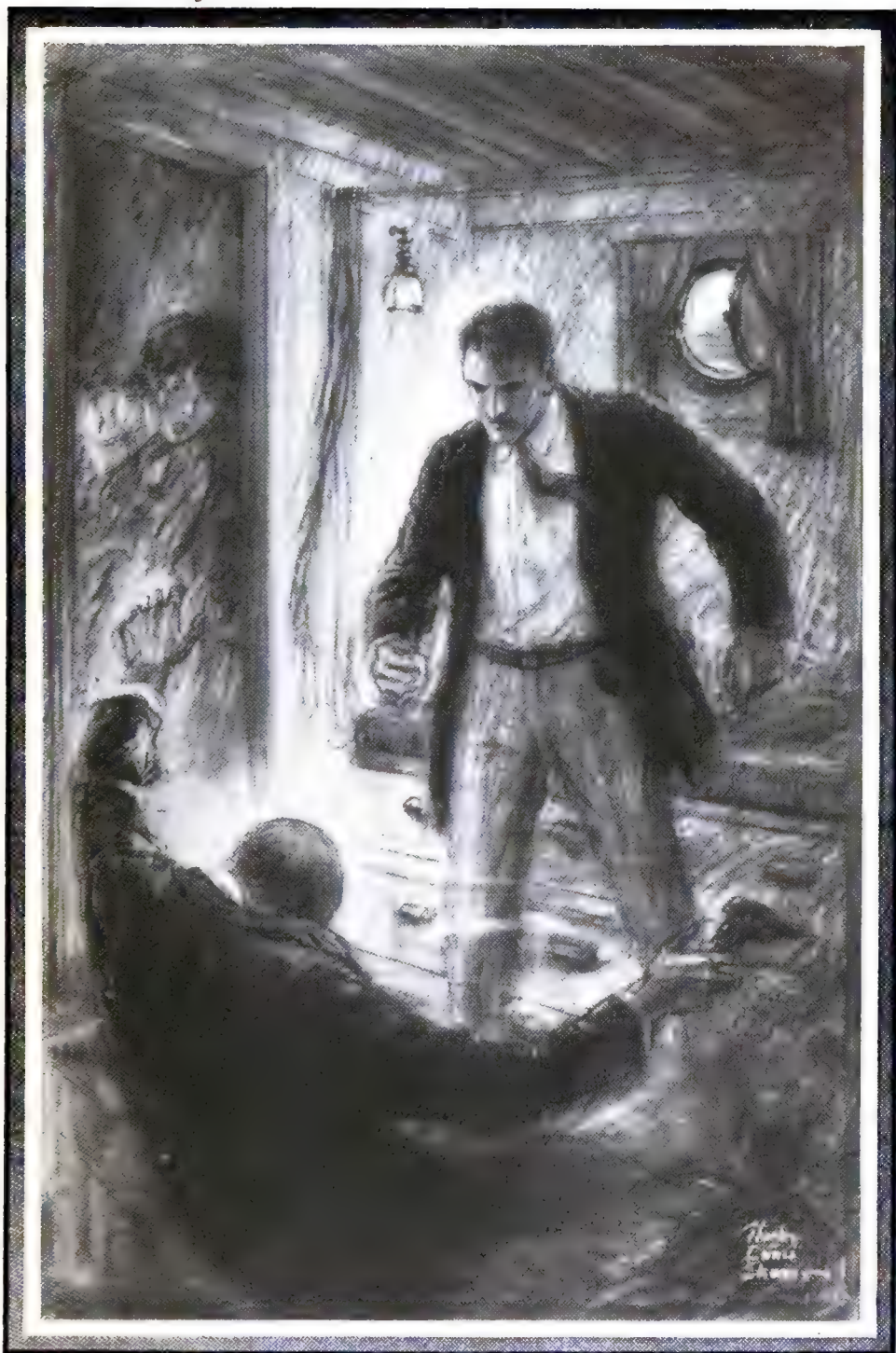
"Stop!" he begged. "I've had enough of this business. I don't suppose we should have touched the five thousand anyhow."

He swung round and entered the chart house. She listened to his brief conversation, covering him all the time. Soon they began what seemed to be a huge turn. The light on their port bow disappeared. Now it was abreast of them. Presently it was aft. The officer in charge finished his directions and came out of the chart room.

"We're back on Mr. Slattery's original course," he announced. "What will happen when that little fat man finds out, I don't know. Or what will happen to me, either."

"Stick to it now," Susan enjoined. "And I'll do the best I can with Mr. Slattery. You've done all you could to make amends, anyhow."

"I can't make out what it all means," he



Von Diss's right arm was knocked up by a cruel undercut; one barrel of the pistol went off harmlessly. With the other hand Grant struck him on the side of the head.

muttered. "What's become of the skipper and Mr. Nicholson?"

"Locked in the engineer's room," she told him. "I can't understand why they couldn't make themselves heard, though."

The young man grinned weakly.

"They're behind solid mahogany," he declared. "All the doors in the officers' quarters are three inches thick. What's that?"

He swung round. Coming toward them through the darkness was Blum, walking on tiptoe, and behind him, gaunt and gray, yet even more menacing, was Funderstrom.

"Give me the gun," the young man begged. "I'm fed up with this."

Susan looked into his face and gave it to him. He turned toward the intruders and the hand which held the pistol was as steady as a rock.

"Look here," he shouted. "Off my bridge, both of you! Not a word, or by God, I'll shoot you both!"

They came to a standstill. The sailor on lookout duty stepped from his canvas shelter and stood staring at them.

"You have altered the course," Blum complained.

"And if I have, what the hell is that to you?" the young man retorted.

"I take it that you don't want your five thousand pounds, then?" Blum inquired viciously.

"Not a penny of it," was the prompt reply. "I want you off this bridge and damned quick, too, or as sure as I'm a living man I'll shoot."

Cornelius Blum stood for a moment irresolute. No braver man than he breathed, but he was also a philosopher.

"Burgess," the mate added, swinging round toward the lookout man, "hurry round to my quarters. Get the key of the officers' mess. You'll find that it will unlock the chief engineer's room. The captain and the chief engineer are both there. Ask the captain to step this way. And listen to me," he went on. "If either of you two interfere with that man, I'll shoot, and shoot to kill."

The sailor saluted and hurried off. Cornelius Blum shrugged his shoulders. He leaned against the rail but he made no further movement forward.

"My young friend," he said, "forgive me if I suggest that you are introducing an un-

welcome note of melodrama into this little affair. It has been a game of wits between your owner and ourselves. I fear that the young lady," he added, bowing to Susan, "has played the winning card. We will voyage with you, sir, in whatever direction you choose. Funderstrom, I am very thirsty."

The two men disappeared. Susan smiled reassuringly up at the young officer by her side.

"That's all right, now," she declared. "You've seen the thing through, after all. It has been rather a mix-up, you know. I'm afraid Mr. Slattery has been behaving very badly."

He looked steadily ahead into the windy darkness.

"Your ladyship is very kind," he rejoined shortly. "A sailor ought to remember that he only has to obey orders."

She left him a moment or two later and walked down the deck. It was hard for her to believe that the whole thing had not been a dream. A steward was handing round glasses of champagne, and Cornelius Blum, with an apologetic grin, was holding a glass in either hand. The Prince, looking very pale and malicious, was seated back in the shadows. Grant, with his head bandaged, was standing on the threshold.

"My dear guests," he announced, waving his hand to Susan, as she came up, "I regret having to tell you that the worst has happened. There is no longer any hope of our reaching Monaco to-night. The captain, who has just gone up on the bridge, has assured me that it is impossible."

"There will be a heavy reckoning," Funderstrom warned him solemnly.

"In the circumstances," Grant went on, ignoring the remark, "I have ordered supper to be served in the saloon."

"Supper," Mr. Cornelius Blum said thoughtfully. "God bless my soul! That's what's the matter with me. I'm hungry."

THE landing was a perfectly carried-out farce. Every one was in high spirits and even Prince von Diss managed to infuse a little cordiality into his thanks for the delightful hospitality he had enjoyed. Grant was very apologetic about the slight trouble with his engines. Every one assured him, however, that the few extra hours at sea had been a pleasure, and studiously

avoided any mention of the mingled farce and drama which they had evoked. On the subject of his dinner, which after two postponements had been fixed for the following night, Mr. Cornelius Blum was eloquent.

"If a single one of you denies me," he declared, "I shall be hurt. It is going to give me the greatest possible pleasure to feel myself, for once, a host, to endeavor to repay a little the sumptuous hospitality I have received. We meet at the Hôtel de Paris at eight o'clock. I have, by the by, asked his Majesty the King of Gothland to meet you. His Majesty is most agreeable and his presence will in no way interfere with what I hope is going to be a cheery evening."

Susan and Grant exchanged amused glances more than once, during this somewhat drawn-out business of leave-taking. Once she drew near enough to him to whisper:

"What a glorious joke! Aren't we all clever?"

"Blum is the man I admire," he said. "The Prince can't get away with it. He looks as though he wanted to stick a knife into some one."

There was a little sprinkling of journalists upon the quay, who had come down on the report that an accident had happened to the *Gray Lady*. They attached themselves especially to Baron Funderstrom, who had, however, one reply to them all.

"It was unfortunate that I could not attend the meeting of the Conference," he said, "owing to the slight accident to the engines which happened when we were some distance out at sea. As a matter of fact, however, I know quite well what the agenda consisted of, and there was nothing in which my views did not coincide with the majority."

"You know," one of the journalists asked him, "that the Conference has decided to invite America to join the Pact?"

"I imagined that would take place," he admitted, without change of countenance. "The decision to forward the invitation, was, I presume, unanimous?"

"The discussion took place in private session," the journalist pointed out; "but one understands that there was no opposition."

Grant glanced at his watch.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

"I wonder if your father is back from Nice," he said to Susan.

She shook her head.

"He does not usually arrive at the Villa until six o'clock. Now that the regular sessions have commenced it may be even later."

"I will come up with you, if I may," he suggested. "I want to see him as soon as possible after he returns. Besides, I want to escape from these people."

"Come along," Susan agreed. "We had better take a carriage. They may send the car down when they see the yacht coming in, but as Peters will be over with dad at Nice, I should think it's doubtful."

They drove off, and the remainder of the little company melted away from the pier, all apparently in the highest of spirits.

"I MUST say one thing about Blum," Grant declared, as they looked backward for a moment from the top of the hill. "He's an unprincipled scoundrel, of course, but he's a sportsman."

"He's much better than that Prince von Diss or that terrible Scandinavian," Susan assented.

"I suppose you realize," he went on, "that you were the pluckiest person on board?"

"Nonsense!" Susan answered, coloring with pleasure. "It was really a tremendous rag."

"I'm not quite sure what that misguided young officer of mine thought about it when he found himself held up by a girl," Grant observed dryly. "They'd have brought it off but for you."

"I'm very glad," she murmured. "Next time you give a party like that, I hope I'm there."

He looked at her for a moment a little wistfully. Youth had certainly befriended her. Gertrude had risen that morning with dark lines under her eyes and her manner on the dock had been almost spiritless. Susan's happy face and smiling expression gave no indication of a night of anxiety.

"I wish you weren't such a kid," he said suddenly.

"What on earth do you mean?" she retorted. "I'm nearly twenty. Surely that is old enough for—for anything. Are you trying to insinuate that I am unintelligent or unformed or something?"

"You are very sweet as you are, Susan," he assured her. "It was a foolish wish. 1

wouldn't have you a day older. And here comes your father. They must have been back early from Nice."

SUSAN scarcely showed her usual joy at welcoming her parent. They all arrived at the Villa together and Lord Yeovil at once drew Grant into his little sanctum.

"I am inclined to think that you must have found a mare's nest, young fellow," he announced. "You can guess my news?"

"You have received the consent of the Pact to forward the invitation to America?" Grant replied.

"Not only that, but my motion was supported by Prince Lutrecht."

"Were there no votes against it, then?" Grant asked, incredulously.

"There were three balls," Lord Yeovil admitted. "That was somewhat of a surprise to us, I must say, but as you know, it was not enough to affect the result."

"Well," Grant told him, "I should like you to realize this: It is entirely due to Lady Susan that you had your own way in this matter. You have won the first step toward breaking up what I am convinced now to be a very malevolent conspiracy, and it was your daughter who made it possible."

"My daughter! Susan!" Lord Yeovil exclaimed. "What do you mean, Grant?"

"I mean that I was right, just as right as I knew I was, all the time. Lutrecht voted against it, as he had always meant to, whatever he may have said at the meeting. So did Katina. That's why he was to go. So did Gortz, the Russian. And if I hadn't abducted Funderstrom and kept him away until too late to go to the meeting, his would have been the fourth vote."

"Abducted Funderstrom?"

"That's just what we did, sir," Grant assured him. "I kept him on the yacht until it was too late for him to go to Nice. There was a tremendous row," he went on, "practically a free fight; and at one time, Blum and Prince von Diss were having things their own way, and they very nearly got Funderstrom back. If it hadn't been for Susan, who took command when I was hors de combat and, with an automatic in her hand, frightened one of my navigating officers to death, they would have done it."

"You'd better not tell me anything more, Grant," Lord Yeovil said, a little

gravely, though there was a twinkle of delight in his eyes. "This sort of thing is outside of the sphere of diplomacy. All I can say is that, whatever you did, I personally am convinced that you did it for the best—and I thank you."

"What I did," Grant said earnestly, "I did chiefly for the sake of my own country. We're only half-way through the trouble, yet, though. The invitation may be sent. As yet it isn't accepted."

"I hope to God it will be!" was the fervent response. "If it isn't I tell you, Grant, no man, even though he had the tongue of a god and all the angels, will be able to induce any future meeting of the Pact to send another invitation."

"I realize that absolutely," Grant acquiesced. "I can assure you of one thing. All that stands for the best in my country will be in favor of accepting, but there is a great deal there that stands for the worst. There will be plots, and bribery and intrigue, any quantity of it. And yet we are going to win. The invitation shall be accepted."

A servant brought in cocktails and Grant was easily persuaded to stay and dine.

"I shan't change," his prospective host told him. "You can send for your things, if you like, or change afterwards if you are going on anywhere. What I want you to do is to sit down in that easy-chair and tell me—unofficially, mind—the whole story of your adventures on the yacht."

Grant lit a cigarette and accepted the invitation.

"When we all wished one another good-by this morning," he said, "I had to pinch myself, metaphorically, to realize that I wasn't dreaming. The whole thing seemed too improbable and fantastic. However, here's the story."

AT A few minutes after ten the next morning the Blue Peter was flying from the masthead of the *Gray Lady* and the last of the little stream of tradespeople were leaving the yacht. There was the usual crowd of loungers upon the dock to watch the departure and on the bridge Lord Yeovil and Grant were standing a little aside talking.

"If anything could make me a convert to your somewhat alarmist point of view, Slattery, Blum's behavior last night would

do it," the former acknowledged, after a little desultory conversation upon the events of the evening before. "I still don't understand what was at the back of his mind."

"I can tell you," Grant said. "You'll find a copy of that speech will appear broadcast throughout America. 'Cornelius Blum, the great shipping magnate, entertains Prime Minister of Great Britain, to celebrate invitation to the United States to join the Pact of Nations.' That's the sort of headline you'll see in every paper which counts. Every word he said will appear verbatim. It's wonderful propaganda for Germany. And—it won't help us to bring about acceptance of the invitation."

"He stole a march on me, I'm afraid," was the somewhat rueful admission.

"NEVER mind," Grant consoled him. "We've won the first round, and Blum knows it. For all his carefully laid scheme to prevent it, America is invited to join the Pact of Nations. Now we'll have to strip for the second round. We shall have to fight like hell to get that invitation accepted. You don't follow our domestic politics, sir, I expect."

"How can I?" Lord Yeovil protested. "I've problems enough of our own to deal with all the time."

"The opinion of the educated and intelligent citizen of the United States upon any vital subject," Grant expounded, "is sometimes, unfortunately, an entirely different matter to the voting force. That is our only danger. Cornelius Blum and his friends know quite well that if America accepts the invitation of the Pact all those grandiose schemes which have been formulated and brought to maturity by Germany and her friends fall to the ground. Peace is assured to the world for an indefinite period of time. Germany must abandon her hope of revenge. Japan must reconcile herself to the permanent subordination of the yellow races. Therefore, strenuous efforts will be made in America to prevent her acceptance."

"I can quite believe it," Lord Yeovil assented. "The peace lover will have German-American interests and the Japanese influence to fight. Still, I can't help thinking that on a question like this the common sense of the country will carry all before it."

"I am with you there," Grant agreed. "And yet it is a fact that there have been, even within my memory, laws passed by Congress which were in absolute opposition to the will of the people. The voting power of America is a chaotic and terribly uncertain quantity. Our friend Blum will be over there before a month is past. Prince Lutrecht will be visiting at Washington. I shouldn't be surprised if Baron Funderstrom takes a little tour there, too. Headquarters will be moved from Monte Carlo to Washington and New York; and we haven't any reasonable means of coping with all the flaring, misleading propaganda which will be let loose to induce America to refuse this invitation within the next few weeks. The only hope will be if by any remote chance one of us is able to discover proof of the subsequent intentions of Germany and her jackals. Otherwise, I honestly believe that there is a serious possibility that the United States, in the most courteous possible tones, will decline your invitation."

"If they do," Lord Yeovil remarked grimly, "I must resign at once from my position as chairman of the Pact and probably from the Premiership of Great Britain. A refusal under the present circumstances would be an affront. You have this matter very much at heart, Grant?"

"I'm an American and I am fond and proud of my country," Grant answered. "I pose as being an idle millionaire. You know I'm not. I never worked so hard in my life as I am working now. I don't fancy my next six months will be any easier. I am going to do my level best to bring the truth home to the American people and to show up the plot which I am convinced is being organized against us. If I succeed I shall come straight back to Europe and, if I may, I shall come and pay you a visit."

Lord Yeovil held out his hand. Probably at that moment the same thought was in the minds of both men.

"You have my best wishes, Grant," he said cordially.

Grant walked with his departing guest to the gangplank and waved his farewell as the yacht backed away into the harbor and swung round. Very soon she was heading for the open sea. The wonderful little bejeweled principality of intrigue, of fierce excitements and strange happenings, grew

fainter but not less beautiful. The sun was streaming down upon the snow-streaked mountain peaks, the white-faced villas, the deep masses of green, the garish but curiously attractive front of the great Casino. Grant breathed a sigh of relief as the coast line faded away and the west wind took them into its embrace. There were ten days at least of freedom—ten days in which to rearrange his thoughts, to prepare for the next stage of the struggle.

He lunched early, dozed for an hour in the afternoon, read for a little time, and discussed the question of coal supply with the chief engineer. They made careful calculations and, to Grant's relief, came to the conclusion that a call at Gibraltar would not be necessary. He was suddenly feverishly anxious to reach New York, to see his friends at Washington, to gauge for himself exactly the feeling which would be created by this fateful invitation. The solitude of

the open seas appealed to him immensely. He sat on deck for a while after dinner, in a sheltered place, listening to the rush of the wind and watching the stars make a fitful appearance.

As the breeze stiffened they altered their course slightly and showers of spray sometimes swept the deck. He turned in early and slept soundly although every now and then he was haunted by a queer sense of some unusual sound, unusual yet not sufficiently distinct to waken him. In the morning he turned out at his usual hour. He took his bath of warm and then cold sea water, strolled on deck, breakfasted in a sunny corner and lit a pipe. After an hour or so he strolled aft on his way to the chart room. As he passed the companion-way he glanced in, gripped at the door, stood stupefied, speechless, aghast. Still wearing the wonderful cloak in which he had last seen her, came Gertrude.

What to do with Gertrude; how to persuade a whole nation to save its own life—these problems now stare Grant in the face. See April *EVERYBODY'S*, on sale March 15.

A New Serial and a New Author

SOMETIMES we hear it said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a new author to break into print. We don't believe it. In fact we know that it isn't hard for a new author to break into *EVERYBODY'S* if he has *the story*. Nearly every month we introduce a newcomer and next month—April—will be no exception. In that issue will appear the opening instalment of an exceptionally fine, and a first, novel—"One-Way Street," by Beale Davis.

You have known young men of unusual personal charm and gifts, pleasure-loving, great dancers, but perhaps at the outset seeming to lack that bit of iron in the soul that carries one over the rough places. It is such a young man that Mr. Davis has chosen for the leading part in "One-Way Street." Clean, untarnished, yet with a too great adaptability of nature, he is thrown into a sophisticated society set in London. The blind alley appears nearer and nearer. The journey of the camel through the needle's eye appears easy compared to that young man Bob Austin's job of finding salvation. There is vital stuff in this novel. It is life.

April *EVERYBODY'S*

Out March 15

Atlas

*To Have the Only Worth-While Thing in Life—Flying—Wrested from Him as Unfit—That Bit Deep.
But Atlas Proved His Mettle Again in Spite of All*

By Thomson Burtis

THE harsh clamor of the alarm clock shattered the silence. The huge figure on the bed turned in instant answer to the summons, and one big groping hand found the clock and shut it off. This accomplished, Lieutenant Dan Symons clasped his hands behind his head and lay quietly for a moment, drugged with sleep. It was barely daylight, and the heavy mist which had blown in over Langham Field blanketed the earth and lent a ghostly chill to the dawn.

For a moment Symons's slow-working brain sought an explanation of the fact that his customary mental depression had turned into savage pain on this particular morning. There was ample evidence that the occupants of the bachelor quarters were awake; water running in bathtubs, scuffling feet, rough early-morning voices. Suddenly Symons realized the significance of it all, and the reason for his own mental anguish.

One hand explored beneath the bed, opened a suitcase, and closed around a small half-pint bottle. Moonshine—white lightning. Then the fingers relaxed, and the hand came back beneath his head. He had been trying to counteract his habitual hopeless depression too often by that method. A remnant of the hard common sense and conscientiousness which had given him his nickname, Atlas, came to his rescue.

He threw off the covers with a vicious sweep of his arm, as though he was sweeping away some of the mental burdens which weighed him down. He shook the motion-

less figure of Tex MacDowell, his roommate, until that lazy Texan and master flyer awakened. When Tex did wake up, he did a complete job of it, however.

"Be right with you. Turn on the cold water again when you get through with the tub," he drawled, and reached for a cigarette. "Weather O. K., Atlas, or are the gods agin us?"

"Good enough," returned Symons, and went into the bathroom.

He stood beside the tub, head bent, waiting for it to fill. With a sort of heavy, inarticulate strength he fought to subdue the aching pain within him.

He tried to make himself believe that he did not care. When he had given of his best, why should he take it to heart that he could no longer be one of the bunch? But he did care. It seemed to him that the only worth-while thing he had found in life had been wrested from him. Twenty-nine years of grinding poverty and squalid monotony—and then three wonderful years when he had found himself, and life, for the first time, had seemed worth while.

Ever since he could remember he had toiled without rest on the rocky farm in New England, alongside his stooped, discouraged father and faded mother, trying to wrest a bare living from the land which begrudged it. His mother had worked herself to death two years before he had gone to college with twenty dollars in his pocket. Twice he had given up the struggle for an education, only to reverse his decision within a day. Finally he commercialized

his big body and rocklike fists as a cheap pugilist. For three and a half years he fought every other Saturday night somewhere in New England, for purses that had never exceeded seventy-five dollars. The marks of it were on him for always, a flattened nose, one ear ever so slightly bloated, a deep scar over his right eye.

Then the death of his father, and the war. And there he found himself. Somewhere in the big, rather awkward body and slow-working, logical brain had been hidden the fundamentals of the born flyer. He had never been a flashy airman. That end of the game had not appealed to him. But he could set a ship down where another would crack up, and the perfection of his judgment of speed and distance was a byword. "The man who never crashed"—so he was called in France. And he was as unerring a shot with a machine-gun on his ship as he was with a rifle on the ground.

FOR the first time he knew what it was to be without financial worry. His devotion to duty and calm dependability had had their reward, too, in increased rank. He had never lost the wild thrill and transcendent satisfaction of having the sky for a playground, and a sensitive craft of boundless power which answered the slightest touch of his inspired hand. To him the Air Service was parent, sweetheart and child. He loved it and believed in it from the oldest De Haviland to the youngest pilot.

Then, two months before the armistice, he had been shot down. The Germans found six bullets in him, and one of them had affected the vision of one eye. He recovered quickly, and one of the stories of the service which would be told so long as it endured was the tale of Dan Symons's and Dink Greet's escape from the hospital, their theft of a German ship at a near-by airdrome, and their flight for the lines. Motor trouble had brought them down before they reached their objective and they had been recaptured, but next day the armistice was signed.

For more than a year he had fooled the doctors, hidden the fact that he was a shell of a man. He had learned the vision charts, and read them glibly, forward and backward. What the bullets, plus a touch of gas while he lay wounded in the German lines, had done to his lungs was shown par-

tially in the altitude test, but by superhuman efforts he had made the doctors believe that he could stand ten thousand feet all right.

But he had finally been caught, right at Langham Field. The semiannual examination, one of those recurring nightmares which he dreaded, had finally ferreted him out as unfit to fly. The only personal achievement in which he had ever taken pride, his status as one of the Army's best pilots, was a thing of the past. It was only pity which had left him in flying status at all, as an observer. And not even as an observer and bomber was he adjudged wholly fit. He was only a substitute, condemned to sit on the sidelines while his comrades went out to meet the test—the bombing of the old German battleship, prize of war, doomed now to be a target for the Army planes.

Yet, in the end, he did fly; called upon at the last minute he took part, as bomber for young Sinton, whom he himself had taught: a rich youngster, almost a failure, who owed his wings to Atlas. And, after the triumph, it was he who suggested that Sinton be sent in answer to the hurried call from West Virginia, where troops were gathering to suppress the ugly menace of the latest labor war that had terrorized the coal fields.

IT WAS ten o'clock in the evening of the day after the great test, right in the midst of Dick Alden's rendition of a hymn called "The Merry Monarch of England," that an orderly stood hesitating in the doorway of Dan's room, which was crowded with rosily glowing flyers. Alden stopped the song, and Symons got up.

"Want me, or MacDowell?"

"Lieutenant Symons, sir. Major Jackson's compliments, and he requests that you report immediately at his office."

"What's up, do you know?"

"I think you're to go over to Charleston to-morrow, sir."

Sinton was on his feet in a second.

"Listen, Atlas, tell 'em you want me to fly you, will you? I'd give my shirt to go——"

"You haven't any competition, Snippy, my son," drawled MacDowell, in the very act of mixing one. "As for me, I want to stay at home peacefully and watch the rest

of the world go by, or come forth, or stay where they are, or——"

"If for any reason they do not, find out why so," Spears finished for him.

"Will you, Atlas?" demanded Sinton.

Symons grinned a wry grin, and nodded. Of course, he would have to have a pilot—he was no longer a flyer. It might as well be Sinton as any one.

MAJOR "LAMB" JACKSON was awaiting him, striding across his office with short-legged, jerky strides and smoothing the few spikelike bristles which garnished his upper lip. During the excitement incident to the summer's maneuvers the Major had contracted the habit of blowing up with a loud report at least twice daily, but he was now comparatively placid.

"Come in, Symons. Sit down. Have a cigarette? Here's your orders. You are to leave to-morrow morning for Charleston in a Martin, carrying fifteen hundred pounds of bombs—twenty-five-pound personnel bombs. Major Gary, in charge, wired that bombs would be necessary. This is confidential. I'm telling you so that you'll realize the extent of your duty. It is the opinion of General Allen, backed by Major Gary, that the psychological effect of bombs may stop these outlaws without further bloodshed. This opinion is well founded on previous developments. If they don't stop 'em without bloodshed, they'll do it the other way. The situation has suddenly increased in seriousness.

"Major Gary particularly requested that you accompany the ship. He insisted on it. Any reason you know of?"

"I served under the Major in France," returned Symons.

He was to be inducted into his Atlas rôle again. The Major would hand over all the detail work to him, and leave him to run the detachment—mess, paper work, reports, supplies.

"I see," nodded Jackson. "Must like your work. You'll start at seven o'clock. Ship is being readied and loaded now. As to the pilot—have you any choice? The ship *must* get there——"

"Lieutenant Sinton would like to go, sir."

"Hum! I don't know. Good pilot, but lacks experience, maybe— Hum! Well, all right, if he suits you. Get yourself maps from the operations office and be on the line

at seven sharp. Tell Sinton. Understand everything? That's all. Good night."

Dan lounged along homeward, past the hangars and across the field toward the twinkling lights of the barracks. A close-harmony chorus poured through the open windows, softened into sweetness by the distance.

Curse himself as he would for a self-pitying, sentimental fool, he was powerless to resist the clutch of it on his heart and to subdue the deep, inarticulate rebellion against fate which slumbered within him, fanned into vicious flame a dozen times a day by chance words and ever-recurring reminders of the difference between the present and the glorious past.

His broad, battered face was set in brooding lines, and the heavy shoulders were stooped despondently as he thought:

"One jump ahead of the infantry, and they're gaining all the time!"

DESPITE leaden skies and a report from the meteorological section that there was a storm area moving eastward toward West Virginia, Sinton and Symons took off promptly at seven next morning. Their mission brooked no delay if there was a chance to get through.

Dan had had a glimpse of the morning papers, which chronicled the growing gravity of the situation. They had given much space to the fact that bombs were being rushed to the troubled area, and went on further to describe how the advent of the airplanes had temporarily halted the march of the strikers. That there were loaded machine-guns on the ships did not mean much to them, it seemed. It was the general opinion that with the threat of bombing from the air hanging over them they would come to their senses and stop before a real pitched battle became necessary to drive them back. The Federal authorities were playing a waiting game for the present, trying to handle the situation without further bloodshed.

There were bombs enough to give pause to five or six hundred men, certainly, Dan reflected. The bomb compartment directly behind the seats had been furnished with a board flooring, and within it were piled five dozen twenty-five-pounders—enough to blow every man of the outlaws to heaven, hell, or wherever he was booked.

He hoped there would be no trouble about getting there with them—might save a lot of lives. He peered at the sky with experienced eyes as the Martin roared along westward. There was a continuous layer of clouds, eight or nine thousand feet high, and the rays of the sun could find no loophole through them. Down below the earth was dark and somber, with the remnants of the ground mist still clinging to it. The James River, which they would follow as far as Richmond, seemed like a great gray snake, stretched sullenly on the ground.

PETERSBURG on the south, and Richmond on the north, dropped behind them. The fields became smaller, and broken more frequently by large clumps of trees. Far ahead the Cumberlands loomed against the sky, their tops swathed in mist. Just west of Richmond they had to swing southward a few miles to go around a thunderstorm. It was the only one Dan could see, although beneath the overhead canopy of mist there were rolling, murky clouds hanging heavily in the sky.

The Martin made its steady way over the low-rolling foothills which swept up to the foot of the range, and Dan concentrated on his map. From there on it was a case of flying a compass course, pretty largely. The few railroads twined and twisted around the mountains, and there were no streams flowing east and west. He had laid out the course to strike the Kanawha River well below Charleston, and after they had picked that up Charleston would be easy to spot. But there was a long stretch of at least two hours when they would have to wing their way along above the mountains, with no idea of their exact location. There were no landmarks, so they must just wait for the river.

At frequent intervals he scrutinized the instruments, and also the ground. It was the instinct of the flyer, which would not down whether or not he was handling the ship himself. As always, he was conscious of the strain of being a passenger. His fingers itched for the wheel, and there was never a moment when he was not mentally flying the Martin.

They were eight thousand feet high, a few hundred feet below the solid layer of clouds which stretched from horizon to horizon. At frequent intervals they had to

circle to escape lower-hanging banks of mist. Both airmen did their best to estimate the distance the ship had swung off-course, and to compensate for it, but after a while they could not be sure that they were still pointed exactly for the river. Finally Dan, who as observer was in charge of navigating, signaled Sinton to follow a slightly more northerly course, to make sure that they would eventually hit their objective.

The foothills dropped away behind them, hidden by the first group of mountains. In a few minutes the ship was a speck in the sky above a mighty panorama of heavily wooded mountains, split by deep-cut cliffs and ravines. Forest-covered slopes led up to hoary peaks which lifted their heads to within a few hundred feet of the Martin. Some of the valleys were filled with mist, and here and there a mountain top rose like a green island from a calm gray sea of fog. The sturdy Martin, which had seemed so mighty with its trunklike struts and bellowing motors was suddenly puny as it drove its way above the rugged grandeur of the untamed Cumberlands.

The rain-clouds were growing in number, and it was increasingly difficult to avoid them. The smooth rhythm of the motors deepened in tone, as though the Liberties were at one with their masters in wanting to leave behind that deadly region below them.

The showers merged into one, and stinging drops of rain, growing in force and number, pricked into the skin like needles. Dan took out his handkerchief and cleaned his fogged goggles. He leaned over and performed the same service for Sinton, and the little pilot nodded his thanks. He was taut and strained behind the wheel, his face a bit pale and his feet locked against the rudder.

The mist thickened and suddenly the ground was blotted out of sight. The increasing fury of the rain battered their unprotected faces cruelly. The air currents of the storm were made into things of terrific force because of the rugged slopes below, and the storm was a veritable caldron of the winds.

DAN cleaned both pairs of goggles every few seconds, watched the instruments every minute. He forced himself to be cool and watchful and to fight down the

growing fear within him. If only he had the wheel!

They were driving steadily toward the vortex of the storm, he knew. It was growing in power with every second. But there was nothing else to do. He thought of another handkerchief in his pocket, and drew it out. He leaned over and tied it around the lower part of Sinton's face. A rash of red spots was discernible on the pale skin, and Dan knew that his own face was in the same condition from the beating of the rain. That handkerchief would be a relief for Sinton. He put one arm in front of his own face. It was useless to try to wipe their goggles any more, for it did no good. They must struggle blindly ahead, and somehow, some way, get through.

Abruptly the storm pounced on its prey, and the Martin became a crippled bird in the clutch of a monster. The air currents, swirling toward the vortex of the storm, caught the plane and played with it like a bit of fluff in a whirlwind. The rain became a torrent, and jagged streaks of lightning split the blackness all around them. Crackling rolls of thunder drowned even the roar of the motors.

WITH no sight of earth or sky to guide them, there was no chance to keep the ship level. Terrific skids and slips were caught only when their tortured cheeks felt the suddenly increased force of the air stream on one side or the other. Dan, crouching down as far as he could get, had one hand on the wheel, striving to help the little pilot counteract the battering of the storm. Twice the air-speed meter jumped to a hundred and eighty miles an hour as the Martin dived earthward, and both times it was Dan who pulled it up. They were down to five thousand feet now, and he knew that all around them there were mountains waiting like quiescent monsters to destroy them.

The ship was quivering in every strut and spar as the twisting, straining air currents buffeted it about. It did not seem as though there was such a thing as the earth—it was as though the universe was a hell of churning mist, blinding lightning and thunder that was like the voice of the gods of the storm. The compass was gyrating wildly, and the altimeter needle jumped up and down as the powerless ship was shot

upward or downward in the aërial maelstrom that had it in its grip and was slowly tearing it to pieces.

It seemed that Sinton was utterly petrified with the grim ferocity of it all. Braced against wheel and rudder, he was like a man of stone, without movement or apparent feeling. Dan, one hand on the wheel, strained his eyes ahead continuously. He had discarded his goggles completely, and with eyelids closed until his blazing eyes were a mere slit he grimly stood the torture of the rain. It was possible to see fifty feet ahead, or thereabouts.

Suddenly the murky mist darkened. Instinctively Dan's hand jerked back on the wheel with such force that Sinton's hands almost lost their grip. Towering trees loomed through the vapor. Sinton jammed on the right rudder, and the Martin shot upward and to the right in a quick chandelle, escaping the trees by inches.

FOR a moment the bomber hung in a stall. Sinton did not seem to realize that they had lost flying speed. The ship snapped downward in a twisting dive—the beginning of a tail-spin. Dan jammed the wheel forward himself. It seemed that he was in the grip of some nightmare, and that his raw nerves must give way at any second. That sickening swoop was the end: no, it brought Sinton to his senses. He gave the ship the opposite rudder and it swooped out of that incipient spin. Once again it barely escaped the mountain side—had the slope not been so steep they would have crashed, nose on.

Dan felt as though he would go mad if he did not fly the ship himself. But he fought the panic which seemed about to turn him into a wild man, and forced himself to keep his hand from the wheel.

Sinton was shaken loose from the momentary paralysis which had had him in its grip. He handled the ship as well as any one could for the next few moments. At every opportunity he climbed, watching the speed meter to find out whether he was climbing too steeply or not. It was Dan's feel of the ship, however, which saved them numberless times from stalling and going into another spin.

The altimeter crept up gradually, and once or twice, in the grip of an upward current, the ship gained six hundred feet at a

time. Finally Symons leaned back weakly, and temporary relief flooded over him in a blessed wave. They were seven thousand feet high again, and above the mountains. Perhaps they had a chance.

He had no idea of time. It seemed that they had been fighting along for ages, and would for ages more. Suddenly he grew fatalistic. He had no idea of time; they had been fighting the elements for ages, and would continue for ages more.

SIDE by side the drenched airmen rode like phantoms of the storm; motionless, fatalistic, grimly holding their frail craft to its course. Dan relaxed in his seat, and merely waited for what might turn up. The lightning was less frequent and the mist looked a trifle lighter. Either they would make it, or they wouldn't. That was that.

Suddenly, as though a curtain had been lifted, Dan caught a glimpse of the ground. It looked miles away. It was only a rift in the clouds, but the rain died away to a drizzle and the deep clap of thunder which reached his ears was far behind them. He gripped Sinton, and pointed. In instant answer the pilot threw the ship in a bank, and dropped down through that opening toward the blessed earth. The spiral, even though it was a tight one, took them through the clouds, for the rift was not wide enough to circle in, but every few seconds they caught a glimpse of the ground, and it was good to see.

At four thousand feet they were beneath the clouds, in the slightest of rains, and the ground was in plain sight. Pools of water were standing in the tiny, rough fields. There were a few scattered houses, long distances apart.

Symons looked over at Sinton and grinned, but Sinton did not return the smile. His face was white as chalk below the rain-spots, and his eyes stared wildly. Then he relaxed a trifle, and essayed a smile.

"He hasn't got over it yet," was Dan's mental comment. "I can't blame him. God, what a storm!"

He looked back. A tremendous black mass of churning mist, split by lightning that was almost continuous, spread from side to side as far as he could see. Below it the rain was like a solid mass.

He looked at his wrist watch, and then

leaned over to show it to Sinton. He reached for the throttles, and cut them for a few seconds. The silence was like a physical shock.

"Nearly four hours in the air!" he yelled. "We've got to land, get gas, and find out where we are!"

Sinton automatically nosed down to keep flying speed, and nodded. Quick relief shone in his eyes. Dan shoved on the throttles, and the motors took up their burden once more. Both flyers started a detailed survey of the ground, looking for a landing-place.

Theoretically, the bomber was good for an hour more in the air. However, it was at least an even chance that the oil would give out sooner—oil was always the problem in ships of large gas capacity. The oil pressure on the right-hand motor had dropped from twenty-three pounds to fifteen already, Dan saw. And Charleston might be only fifty miles away, or two hundred and fifty. He had not the slightest idea where they were—they might be in Tennessee for all he knew. All sense of direction had been lost in that titanic battle in the clouds.

Prospects for landing were distinctly rotten. The ground had been soaked by the rain, and there were no large clearings. They were over a narrow valley, the floor of which was cut up into frequent tiny fields, separated by splotches of thick forest. A stream, which might be any one of six on the map, wound its way southward through the middle of it.

He cut the throttle again, and pointed to the compass.

"Might as well fly west—just as good a chance to get a field that way as any!" he yelled, and again the pilot nodded.

It had come to pass that he was the director of the expedition, even if he wasn't flying, Dan thought to himself. It seemed that Sinton was once more a scared, eager cadet back at Issouden, obeying implicitly the orders of his veteran instructor.

They proceeded westward, four thousand feet high. Ahead of them were more mountains, slightly lower than the towering peaks they had surmounted. The rain died away, and in ten minutes they were drumming along beneath a blue sky. The sun shone down on a drenched earth which sparkled under its rays as though studded with jewels.

As the tiny valley was lost to sight behind the mountains it appeared that they had left the track of the storm. The earth was wet, but it had not been thoroughly soaked like the terrain they had left behind. There were no fields, however—gulches and mountains formed a scene of primitive majesty to delight the eye of a tourist and bring dread to the mind of a flyer.

The clouds were now stately mounds of fleecy mist, like masses of cotton hanging in the sky. The Martin wove its way between them, seeming to pick up speed suddenly as it shot past close-lying heaps of snow.

The oil pressure had dropped to ten pounds on the right-hand motor. Dan knew that they must land within ten minutes—but where?

Then it seemed that they had been transported into a different land with the speed of light. The Martin hurtled across a series of jagged peaks, and another valley lay smiling below them. He could see three mines on the mountain sides, and two mining settlements clung to the foot of the slopes. They were unmistakable—square, drab frame houses, as much alike as so many cracker boxes. A sizable town sprawled in the middle of the valley, and several roads which twined down the mountains and through the valley centered there.

It was vastly comforting to find evidences of civilization after the barbaric wilderness they had left behind, but Dan's puckered eyes could find no landing field. He glanced at the oil gauges; six pounds on the right-hand motor, sixteen on the left.

They must land right now, or do it a little later without the aid of the right-hand motor.

His eyes swept the valley floor for miles. Plowed land gleamed white as snow against spots of green. Not even a shower had sprayed this section.

A mile south of the town he found a landing possibility. It was a narrow green field, on the side of a gradual slope. He pointed, and Sinton throttled the motors slightly and dived for it. The air speed sprang to a hundred and twenty miles and the ship roared toward the ground.

They passed directly over the town, and Symons was conscious of clogged sidewalks and filled streets as a thousand people stopped to gaze at the huge ship above them. On the roads into town automobiles

and wagons were stopping to let their occupants out for a look.

Sinton swooped down over the field, and Symons studied it carefully. Probably a hundred and fifty yards long, apparently smoothly cropped grass, and on a fairly steep grade. At the northern and lower end it dropped off into a deep ravine. At the edge of the ravine farthest from the field a thin line of trees and what was apparently a high-tension line met in a V which pointed away from the field. It would be possible to skim in over this obstacle, glide over the ravine, and land at the very edge of the field. The upward slope might stop them safely short of the forest which began at the upper end of the clearing.

He illustrated his judgment with gestures, and Sinton agreed without question. Flying less than a hundred feet high he banked around and flew past the ravine and straight toward the mountain a mile ahead. He turned back toward the field in a long, shallow bank, and got straightened out for it a safe five hundred yards back.

*Symons hunched over in his seat, waiting. It was agony to have to let another man make that landing.

SINTON cut both throttles completely off; suddenly the sigh of the wires took the place of the all-pervading roar of the Liberties. The Martin rushed downward through the air toward the wires and trees. With the instinct which had never failed him in the air, Dan knew that the ship would not get over them, much less the ravine. His hand stretched toward the throttles, but he held back, looking over at Sinton.

The youngster was rigid behind the wheel, glaring straight ahead. He was overcontrolling, too, in the effort to counteract the terrific bumps which were tipping the ship around. He jumped as Dan's hand shoved the throttles forward. The downward rush ceased as the propellers bit into the air. Dan almost had to pull back on the wheel, but finally Sinton did that. As they skimmed over the barrier Dan cut the throttle and then leaned over and snapped the switches.

"He's gone to pieces!" he thought, as the propellers slowed down and the motors silenced abruptly.

He was right. His own throttle-handling caused the ship to hover and drop within ten feet of the ravine edge, but Sinton did not get the tail down. The ship bounced twice, and then bumped along the ground. It stopped forty yards from the trees at the upper edge.

SINTON could not get out of the ship quickly enough. He tried twice to light a cigarette, and made the grade on the third effort. He shivered slightly as Dan walked around the nose of the ship toward him.

Symons knew what the matter was. The kid's nerve was gone, for the moment at least. However, nothing would be gained by taking any notice of that now.

"I'm going to take a little walk down the field and see how it looks for a take-off," he said casually. "While I'm doing that you can find out where we are and how far we are from Charleston. Here come some people that can tell us, I guess."

Sinton licked his dry lips as he turned to look at two men, a woman and three children who were climbing the fence which separated the field from the road. A weather-beaten cabin stood in the midst of a clump of trees on the other side of the dirt highway.

The little pilot merely glanced at them, and then his gaze returned to Symons.

"We—we can't take off from here, Symons," he said huskily, and there was appeal in his voice.

"We'll see," grunted Dan.

His eyes returned to the cabin, and he noticed what was apparently a telephone line leading from it.

"We may not even have to go to town," he remarked. "Well, you interview the residents while I take a squint at the field."

He made off quickly. It was unpleasant to be near the pale, shaken Sinton. He wanted to give the boy a chance to get a grip on himself. If he were really as badly off as he seemed, there was only one remedy for it. It was no disgrace to lose one's nerve, but that same nerve had to be flown back into a man. Couldn't get it back staying on the ground.

He walked down to the edge of the ravine, watching the ground carefully. It was rough and humpy, but hard. On the far side of the ravine, there was a gap of forty feet at the angle of the V they formed, but

that would not help the take-off. The Martin's wing-spread was over seventy feet. The ship would have to get over the obstacle.

He could see Sinton talking to the curious West Virginians as he looked up the field. His instinctive judgment was that the take-off could be made. Without taking any definite measurements, his trained eye registered the impression that there was room enough. A Martin, by reason of its two motors, would turn on a dime, and could be practically backed against the trees at the upper end of the field. The take-off was downhill, so speed would be picked up quickly. The ship should certainly take the air at the edge of the ravine, and the power line and trees were only thirty feet or so higher than the level of the field.

It was a possible take-off at any time. In view of their precious cargo, it was an obligatory take-off. It never entered his head that they could play safe, in the circumstances.

Sinton turned toward him as he came close to the small group of onlookers.

"We're only sixty miles from Charleston, and the Kanawha is almost due north of us," he said, his voice slightly shrill.

"Good!" grunted Symons. "Can we use your telephone, sir, to order some gas and oil? I also want to call up Charleston. We'll get the rate and pay you, of course."

"Yes, suh, yes, suh!" was the cordial reply of the stooped, bedraggled farmer.

Three automobiles in close pursuit of one another came up the road in clouds of dust.

"Guess you'd better stick here and keep the crowd off," said Symons. "There'll be a mob soon."

Sinton's hands clenched and relaxed nervously. He drew Symons farther away from the natives.

"Dan, you're crazy!" he gulped. "We can't take off here! That power line carries sixty-six thousand volts—we couldn't get over it, loaded as we are—it's suicide!"

"Providing nothing happens, we can take off!" said Dan doggedly.

"I'm pilot, and I'm not going to take off!"

"Think it over," advised Symons.

Sinton did not meet his probing eyes, but turned aside, eyes on the ground. Dan followed his host over to the house.

In five minutes he had ordered the gas

and oil from the garage in Hillcrest—which was the name of the town—and had put in a call for Charleston. By dint of a little exaggeration of both his rank and the importance of the message, he had Major Gary on the wire in less than ten minutes.

"This is Symons, Major. We had a forced landing at Hillcrest, sixty miles southeast of you, a few minutes ago. Everything all right. We'll take off as soon as we've got gas and oil."

"Fine!" There was a world of relief in the Major's voice. "Who's your pilot?" he inquired.

"Sinton, sir."

"Is he all right? Can he make the take-off? That's tough country."

"He's all right," Dan lied.

"Good luck to you—and for the love of Mike get those bombs here quick! The moment that Martin lands everybody in Charleston'll know the bombs are here, and that means that within a short time this wild-eyed bunch of guerrillas in the woods will know it. We'll demonstrate with a couple of 'em, and then the war'll be over."

The purring of automobiles had under-toned the entire conversation, and when Dan came out on the porch he saw the reason. The road was lined with cars, and a pall of dust for nearly a mile indicated that the crowd was still coming. Flyers know that there are few spots on the globe where a crowd cannot materialize around an airplane, but Hillcrest was breaking all records. Fully a hundred people were standing along the fence already, but no one had approached very close to the gigantic plane. Dan found out later that Sinton had broadcast the news that there were fifteen hundred pounds of bombs aboard.

The crowd fell back respectfully to let the big flyer through. No one, apparently, dared to address him, which was a relief. As he reached the ship Dan was conscious for the first time of utter weariness. He lay down under a wing to await the coming fuel.

Sinton came toward him. He had been standing a little distance down the field.

"Did you—get Charleston?" he asked.

"Uh-huh."

Sinton started to ask another question, but thought better of it. He wandered around the ship, head bent and eyes on the

ground. He slapped his leg ceaselessly with his helmet, and apparently could not bear to stay still.

DAN stretched out at full length on the ground and wrestled mentally with the problem that faced him. As always, when his slow-working, thorough mind reached a conclusion, it was a conclusion, and as far as he was concerned it would be carried out. The prospect was not pleasing, but as he saw it there was only one thing to do—duty demanded it, and it was for Sinton's best interests, both personally and professionally.

There was no thought of Dan's own personal welfare in his mind as he decided that he must take the plane off himself. It would be suicide to let Sinton handle the wheel, even if he would, in his present condition.

The gas truck arrived in a few minutes, in charge of two men. For a half hour the airmen and the garage employees worked, and at the end of that time the gauges over the tanks were reading thirty gallons each, and the oil tanks were full. Dan had ordered only enough gas to get them to Charleston, for every bit of weight they could spare would help on the take-off.

He glanced toward the densely packed crowd along the fence, and then turned to the mechanics.

"Would you mind seeing to it that no one moves any further out on the field during the take-off?" he asked, and the two men nodded.

"Think yuh can rise out o' hyar?" one of them asked. His eyes roved over the huge Martin, bulking as large as a small house above them.

"No!" Sinton exploded shrilly.

"Yes," rumbled Dan. "Will you take charge of the crowd now?"

They made off, swelled with importance, and Dan turned to Sinton.

"You've lost your nerve!" he said with calculated brutality. "I'm going to take this ship off and get it to Charleston. You can come along with me. Or, if you like, you can stay here and be branded as a yellow-livered coward from one end of the service to the other!"

It was wickedly cruel, but he knew that the only hope for Sinton was to force himself in that ship and let the air itself steady his

nerve. And it was up to him to sting the kid into going.

"It's—it's insanel!" barked Sinton, his face contorted. "I tell you——"

"Get in that ship!"

SINTON started, and for a moment seemed about to leap on the lowering Symons. Then he gestured hopelessly, and silently climbed up into the cockpit. Whether it was the presence of the crowd, or the knowledge of what the whole service would whisper about him, or the subconscious memory of the days when Symons's orders had been the law and the prophets to a lowly cadet, there was no knowing—it might have been any one of the three, and was probably a combination of them all.

"Prime the right-hand motor," Symons ordered, and spun the propeller.

"Clear!" he shouted, and Sinton leaned over and pressed the starter. The Liberty caught on the first try, and idled along gently.

When the other motor had been started Dan went around to the back of the plane, climbed into the mechanics' cockpit toward the rear of the fuselage, and crawled forward over the bomb compartment to his seat. The propellers made this procedure necessary. Sinton was slumped down in the observer's seat, watching the instruments with unseeing eyes.

Dan was aware of a great pity for the young flyer. It was a hideous ordeal for him, and not a pleasant one for Dan himself.

"It'll kill him or cure him," he told himself grimly as he strapped his belt.

He warmed the motors carefully, although it was a slow job without wheel-blocks, for they could not be turned up more than eight hundred revolutions each. Finally the temperature had reached seventy, and oil and air pressure gauges were reading correctly. He shoved the spark levers to full advance, and then opened the motors to a thousand revolutions. The Martin started crawling toward the trees. Fifty feet from them he cut the left-hand motor to idling and opened the other Liberty wide. The ship swept around to the left.

Three-quarters of the way around he shoved the left-hand throttle forward as far as it would go. Before its propeller took hold the momentum brought the ship

the rest of the way around. Just as it pointed straight down the field both motors were pulling together, and the Martin had a flying start. It was a bit of expert motor-handling and delicate synchronization which had gained at least twenty-five feet of precious space.

Dan braced himself against the wheel, and in a few seconds the tail came up. With increasing speed the four-ton ship sped down the field, straight for the deadly barriers ahead. There could be no turning back now, whatever happened. Cutting the motors in an attempt to stop would mean a crack-up, for the Martin's momentum would carry it straight ahead into the ravine.

Leaping exultation filled Dan as he felt the mighty ship under him answering to his will. For the moment there was no thought of failure as the lip of the depression rushed nearer.

A HUNDRED feet from the ravine the ship suddenly quivered and bounced into the air. The motors faltered badly as the shock affected the carbureter floats. They had hit an unusually large hummock, Dan thought, and inevitably for a second or two, the motors missed. But this was more than a second or two! For what seemed like eternity the two motors spat and missed. He felt the ship lose momentum, and then pick up again as the motors cut in.

With the knowledge that thousands of hours in the air had given him, he knew that the temporary loss of power had jumped the odds to a hundred to one against them.

The next second they were a hundred to nothing. As the Martin shot over the edge of the ravine it did not swoop smoothly upward, but settled. Only a few feet, before it picked up flying speed, but enough to make it a total impossibility to get over that deadly power line, or the trees. In the split-second of transcendent mental clarity which always came to him when he was faced with an emergency, Dan saw the one chance he had and unhesitatingly took it.

Instead of pulling up on the Martin, he deliberately nosed over. With accelerating speed the tremendous craft hurtled across the hollow, straight for the left-hand side of the V—the power line. Twenty yards from it he threw the ship into a right bank

with wheel and rudder. As it tipped upward it rushed toward the wires. In an almost vertical bank the ship curved through the narrow opening between wires and trees, the right wing barely escaping the ground and the left wing a scant three feet from the wires.

He felt the Martin settle a bit in that steep bank—there was insufficient speed to hold it without slipping. He waited an instant before bringing it out, jockeying with all his skill to keep the lower wing clear of the ground. It curved around the trees, and with spinning wheel and left rudder on all the way he brought it out. The trees rushed by on the right as he scraped the ground, headed across the sloping clearing. Another clump of trees was directly ahead.

As the plane picked up speed again, Symons made a lightning estimate of their chances. Thirty feet from them he pulled back on the wheel. The Martin zoomed upward and cleared them, although he could feel the foliage drag through the undercarriage. He fought grimly to keep it from settling, and there were a few seconds when it was an even-money shot whether the great plane would settle into them or drag itself along above them. Then he felt it gather speed, and dared to nose up a trifle. The ship answered, and the clutching tree-tops dropped below them. The next moment the bomber was flying back across the landing field, gaining altitude steadily as the motors roared their song of triumph.

As they circled around, gaining altitude above the milling crowd, there came a moment of utter contentment and satisfaction to Dan Symons. He might be a washout—in fact, he knew he was. But the old touch was there, and the tiny doubt which had sprung in his own mind was gone. The intrinsic ability which had been his source of deepest personal satisfaction was unimpaired within him, even if physical things like eyes and lungs were bad.

He looked over at Sinton. The pilot was white as a sheet, but he nodded and clapped his hands together.

Dan waited until the ship was two thousand feet high before he started northward toward the river. He knew that the youngster next to him was brooding bitterly on the ordeal ahead—landing in front

of the bunch at Charleston as an observer in the ship he was supposed to pilot. For a moment Dan played with the dream of landing there himself—living evidence of the fact that he was no broken-down has-been. It was pleasant, but there was never an instant when he did not know that it would never come to pass. He was through, anyway—and Sinton was just starting on his career.

He unstrapped his belt, and then nudged Sinton. Snippy looked around, and Dan gestured his meaning. Sinton stared uncomprehendingly for a moment, and then his face was suddenly transfigured. Dan remembered that expression from the old days, when he had occasionally varied his harsh words of criticism by praise. He slipped out from under the wheel, holding the ship steady as Sinton slid over into the pilot's seat.

FOR the next moment Dan watched the actions of the tiny flyer with eyes that never wavered from his face. Then he sank back, satisfied. The treatment had done more than get the ship off the ground—that quick brush with destruction had steadied Sinton's nerve. As had happened many a time in the service, an emergency had shown the difference between temporary nerve strain and an ineradicable streak of yellow.

In twenty minutes they came in sight of the Kanawha, twisting along deep between the mountains. A thin fringe of fields all along it made a forced landing something to be considered without undue nervousness. Dan was suddenly aware of the fact that his heart was thumping wildly, and that every nerve in his body seemed shrieking a protest. The strain had told on his weakened body, and with closed eyes he fought for control.

In slightly less than an hour after the take-off he spotted the bridges of Charleston ahead, and the pall of smoke over the city. The field was on the left bank of the river, readily picked up because of the line of planes along one edge.

Sinton throttled slightly, and nosed down. Handling the ship with one hand and his throttle levers with the others, he gradually reduced the speed of the motors, cutting them to idling fifty yards back of the boundary fence. They skimmed the

fence and hit on three points for a perfect landing. He was himself again.

A SCORE of pilots and mechanics, and as many civilians, surrounded the plane as they taxied to the line. The De Havilands were dwarfed by the massive Martin, and seemed like playthings beside the great bomber.

Many questions were thrown at them, and Dan answered his share briefly. Bad storm, forced landing in a fair field, safe take-off—that was all. At first Sinton had kept his peace, brushing aside all questions and waiting for Dan to answer them. When Dan gave no hint of the fact that he himself had made the take-off, Sinton took the cue and brushed aside the whole matter as being of no consequence.

"Well, how you found a field in that country and got a Martin in and out of it beats me," said Major Gary. "Nice work, Sinton. Well, Atlas, my boy, come to headquarters tent and get to work."

And in headquarters, fifteen hours a day, Dan did work. Endless details occupied his time, and everything from morning reports to confidential wires came under his eye. Outside, all day long, there was the roar of incoming and outgoing patrol ships, to remind him that he was a ground man for always—doing the only thing he was fit to do by sitting at a desk and chaperoning the sergeant-major.

Sinton avoided him persistently. Dan himself did not take advantage of the ceaseless round of social events which Charleston arranged for the benefit of the flyers, and stuck to his desk until bedtime, so he and Sinton trod separate ways. The youngster never entered headquarters—some one else always got his mail for him and signed the roster with his initials. From divers sources he heard remarks anent Sinton's sudden humility about flying, and his dislike of talking about it even in the company of worshipful Charleston flappers. All the airmen knew Snippy's proclivities, and the lack of at least one vivid description of his trip was really a phenomenon to them.

One week, to a day, after his arrival Dan got the official order which sent the detachment home. The emergency was over. He sent it over to Major Gary's tent, and in ten minutes the C. O. and himself were

started on the task of preparing the troops to leave. Two days of ceaseless labor—packing, shipping, arranging for a special train, and countless annoying details—found the outfit ready to go. Out on the field the ships were lined up for the take-off, and the edges of the field were minus the regular rows of tents which had housed the enlisted men. All but the men who would fly home were safely on their way.

Dan, who had been in town most of the day getting the men off, strolled over toward the towering oak tree beneath which a half dozen of the flyers were stretched, waiting for a taxi to take them to town. Major Gary was there, and Sinton, among others.

"Atlas, who took that ship off over in Hillcrest?" demanded a voice. Sam Ralston, it was.

"Who do you think?" countered Symons surprisedly.

"Come out from behind that cauliflower ear; we know you!" chuckled Jimmy Mollison. "Sinton's been telling us all about it."

Sinton, indeed, had come through at last.

IT WAS nearly a week after the return of the detachment from Charleston that Dan, answering a bid to headquarters, was ushered into General Mallory's private office. He was totally astonished to find who was awaiting him, and could only look at the stocky, active young chief and wonder what it was all about.

"Good afternoon, Symons. Have a chair. How've you been?"

"Major Gary has been telling me of your little trip over to Charleston. Good work, Symons. But then, we expect that of you. What was it they used to call you in France? Atlas, wasn't it?"

The General grinned a wide and boyish grin, and Dan's heavy dark face lightened amazingly as he answered it.

"Gary tells me your wounds have finally resulted in taking you off duty as a pilot, and that you're looking forward to being shuffled out of the Air Service into the line. Gary thinks you'll probably get out altogether if that happens. How about it?"

Dan nodded silently.

The General waited a moment to give his subordinate a chance to unburden himself, but apparently there was no such

intention in the big flyer's mind. Dan waited, his huge body sunk deep in a chair.

He had no idea to what extent he had revealed himself to Major Gary, or that General Mallory had received considerable information from the Major.

The General lit another cigarette, got up from his desk, and looked out of the window as he talked.

"I can understand your position, I think. And I think I know all you veteran flyers well enough to know that another branch of the service would be torture to you—you'd rather get away altogether than have the constant reminder of your first love, so to speak.

"Symons, you're a flyer. I know that. It's galling to have to be a has-been as a pilot. I know that, too. But after what we've shown the world lately there's more important work for the old-timers to do than steer a ship around. We're in charge of building an Air Service worthy of a hundred million people, Symons.

"To be more definite, National Guard and reserve squadrons will be formed all over the country. Each will have a regular-

army man to work with them. It'll be a good job for a reliable man—no boss, pleasant work, and a chance to mold a squadron. The regular-army men we pick for this work will be really the builders of our service. Symons, will you consider staying in the Air Service and taking one of those jobs? You'll be a permanent observer, I know. But you can stand that—and do something for the service. How about it?"

The vista opened by the chief's incisive words was too vast for Dan's plodding brain to grasp, for the moment. Inarticulate as always, he could not formulate his racing thoughts or put into words the meaning of it all. For the moment the personal significance of it was in the background as he strove to comprehend all that the future held forth.

"It's a chance for men like you to pass on the traditions and the spirit which you have absorbed," came the General's voice, "and to build on yourselves as a foundation a service worthy of the place you men have made for it in the last few months. Will you consider it?"

"Yes, sir!"

The Farthest Ports

By Edmund Leamy

LIVERPOOL, Lindi, Singapore,
Port Said, New York, Bombay,
Cadiz, Marseilles, Dar-es-Salaam,
And Delagoa Bay—
Romance is rife and haunting there
To beckon and to nod;
But the fairest ports are the farthest ports,
Where never our feet have trod.

There is allure in Zanzibar
And wonderment in Spain;
A wistful beauty fills the East
To call us back again.
And every port entrancingly
Is lovely as a queen;
But the fairest ports are the farthest ports,
The ports we have not seen.

The fairest ports, the farthest ports—
The light is now too pale,
These eyes too weak to mark a course,
These hands to reef a sail.
And now with other sailormen
We yarn—kind clings to kind—
Of the fairest ports, the farthest ports,
The ports we'll never find.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

The Human Side of the Racetrack

The Fourth Big Brother

*We've Had the Humorous Side of Racing—Now We
Have in This Series by Mr. Carson the Other Side,
the Real, Gripping Side*

By Sam Carson

Illustration by Courtney Allen

THE fight really began as the starter's barrier shot upward and released seven plunging two-year-olds to fight for the October Juvenile Stakes at Churchill Downs. However, personal conflict between two small boys is small competition against the sight of thoroughbreds, particularly if you are outside the track wall and granted but a brief glimpse of a hard-urged field battling at the head of the stretch.

So Jimmie Higgins brought out Sea Princess, with whip and hands and spur, and shot her forward, to win by two full lengths; and a solemn, thin-faced boy of twelve, outweighed fifteen pounds, edged his opponent from the telephone-pole step and obtained one full moment of glory before the shouting died away. Then he descended.

"What you mean by taking my pole," he demanded of the sturdy figure in overalls, "when Jimmie Higgins was riding, too?"

"'Tain't yore pole. And I'll go up again if I want to. I am going up."

That brought on the fight. The growing circle of shouting, gleeful boys drew men, dogs and one shrill-voiced matron, who strove without success to reach the combatants. Two policemen, on duty at the automobile entrance, arose hastily. Both broke into a trot when the woman cried out sharply, then plowed into the twisting ring of humanity.

"What's all this about?" puffed Officer

Henley from the ringside. "Fighting again, hey?" This to the smaller figure, who stood, fists up, ready for the overalled boy to arise. "You'll get a ride this time. What's your name?"

"It's Major Tyler's brat—stays over at Craig's boarding-house," the gingham-clad woman supplied. "Picking on my boy—and him so young. Only five minutes ago I let him go across the street to see the races. And here a—a—hateful little rough-neck hits him in the nose." She straightened, hands on hips, for the moment disregarding her weeping son. "Ain't there no purtection?" she demanded. "I'm going to see the courts, I am. Can't let my boy outside without some pore trash hurting him."

Officer Henley looked down at the accused with twinkling eyes. "Your first name, son?"

"Ted. I don't care if you do run me in. I licked him. And he's—he's the bully of the racetrack gang."

The policeman elevated his left eyebrow slightly, and at the signal his companion began to scatter the crowd. Henley turned to the storming woman. "Madam, if you want to press this complaint, I'll have to take both of the kids over to the substation and book 'em for juvenile court. Otherwise——"

That was sufficient; mother and son scuttled across the road, to the haven of a white-painted cottage.

Officer Henley chuckled, gazed down at his wide-eyed charge. "Come along, son—over by the taxi entrance.

"It's a serious charge, young Mr. Ted," the officer affirmed, back at his post of duty. "You're taking charge of somebody else's property. That telephone pole ain't yours."

"But I gotta see the races—gotta go back and tell grandpop about 'em."

Henley nodded. "You'll be Jo Tyler's son?"

"Yessir."

"Knew him well," Henley mused thoughtfully, "—mighty well. Remember the car-barn fire that got him. Your grandpa never did get over his joining the fire department—couldn't see how any son of his could keep off the track. Wants you in the business, eh?"

The boy's face brightened. The deep brown eyes reminded Henley of a smiling woman, laid away to rest before Jo Tyler's passing. "Yessir. Grandpop says I'd make a good jockey. I'm twelve and don't weigh more'n eighty-five. Some day," he confided, "I'm going to be nearly as good as Jimmie Higgins."

The policeman leaped abruptly to his feet as a taxi driver disobeyed certain rules concerning the impropriety of whirling into the inclosure on two wheels. The explosive language used in his lecture seemed to give Henley comfort, for he returned to the boy with a smile.

"Major Tyler's laid up with rheumatism, ain't he?"

"Yessir."

"Well, son, come with me. I'll put you through the emergency entrance. But don't bring no friends along. And I want to see you to-night. I'll be off duty, on Fourth—above Central. Drop along about seven o'clock.

"Bill," he addressed the gray-uniformed gate attendant, "this is my nephew. Let him in about this time every day, won't you?"

Bill would, although he grumbled some. Henley returned to his companion.

"Ed," he observed, "I got a hunch old Major Tyler's trying to start this kid out to help rustle grub. He's just about cashed in every cent he's got. Following the races right along, too."

Officer Henley had been stationed in and around Churchill Downs for years, before

that particular portion of Louisville had been annexed by the city proper. And he knew full well the story of Major Emerson Tyler, the Job of western turfdom. Fires, railway accidents, flu, breakdowns on the track, had brought the scarlet and blue colors of the Tyler stable down to half mast, then clear out of existence. Major Tyler's jinx had not left him then. Jo, his only son, had developed a stubborn vein; and they had quarreled, so much that the younger Tyler did the unforgivable thing. He had entered the Louisville fire department as a driver, and worked his way up to a lieutenantancy at the time of a disaster which had snuffed out seven lives.

And after that had come rheumatism, leaving the grim-faced, white-haired man a helpless, limb-warped invalid. Now he was hanging on to life, his last few dollars staving off the eventual journey to a dreary building where aged men awaited death at the expense of public funds.

OFFICER HENLEY walked up Fourth Street, past crowded pool rooms where stable employees lounged and bent over green-covered tables. With him walked dapper little Jimmie Higgins and big, clumsy Oliver Townley. They were impatient at the summons and Higgins had just remarked that it was past seven o'clock.

"Hold your peace," Henley advised. "If you still feel that way about it after seeing the kid, well and good. But save your judgment. That's all I ask. The boy's got on my mind."

"For a man that has three husky sons, looks like he wouldn't be worrying about somebody else's," Townley reflected, slowing up to light a fat, black cigar. Townley was trainer for Mason Barr, one of the most tight-lipped and worst hated owners who ever raced on Kentucky soil. Jimmie Higgins was Barr's contract rider, freckled, flushed with success and exulting in the prospect of life which twenty-one holds.

"Sh!" Henley warned. "Here the kid comes now."

It was a wondering trio that gazed at the limping figure with reddened eyes. An arc light sputtered, threw out its greenish white light to offset the orange glow of departing twilight.

"Good night!" Jimmie Higgins exclaimed. Townley, who wore his emotions on his

sleeve, as it were, gulped. "The poor little rascal!"

They were staring at three angry welts across the boy's face—three welts which nothing but a cane, or light club, could have made.

"Who did that!"

Men who had faced sterner realities than the last of the Tylers had trembled before Officer Henley's wrath. But Ted looked calmly up at his interrogator and attempted a smile.

"I'm here," he announced.

A passer-by halted, another. Henley raged because he was not in uniform. But Jimmie Higgins's mind worked swiftly.

"Roadster's around the corner," he called over his shoulder. "Let's take a ride."

So a voluntary tribunal traveled out beyond the city, adjourned to reconvene in the back room of a roadhouse which was withering with the summer. They sat around a table, Henley with an arm about the boy's shoulder. Jimmie, nervous and thoroughly aroused, paced the floor. Townley pulled at his evil-smelling cigar and regarded their guest with moist eyes. "The dad-gummed little rascal," he mused.

"Suppose you tell it all over again," Henley advised. "We're not going to say anything. We're your friends. Brought Jimmie along because you said you wanted to be as good a rider as him."

"Nearly as good," the boy corrected. "Ain't nobody can be as good."

Jimmie Higgins paused at this sincere tribute. "Say, kid!" he announced. "Anything you need—want to learn—money—call on me. That's how much I'm for you."

Probably nothing else could have made Ted break down except this pledge of friendship from his idol. So there was silence in the little room for several minutes, broken only by the sobbing of a child unjustly punished.

"Grandpop — did it," he mumbled, "—'cause I—I forgot to watch the sixth—race. I—I followed Sea Princess over to the stable. She was so—so beautiful."

"Holy smoke!" Townley put in.

"I have to tell him—how every race's run," the boy went on. "How much each horse is in front—and everything. That's why I fought to keep the telephone pole."

"To-night—when I went home—grandpop didn't say much 'cause I'd forgot the

race. But he—called me up to him. And he crooked his elbow under my chin—and hit me—right close. He's got a cane.

"And he"—Ted gulped—"he wouldn't let me eat no supper. Said I'd have to work for it—or s-steal it somewhere."

Jimmie Higgins dashed into the deserted dining-room, summoned a sleepy waiter. "How long before you can scrape up a first-class meal?" the jockey demanded.

The waiter yawned. "No time at all. Guess there's plenty in the kitchen."

"Hustle it along—for the kid," Jimmie ordered. "And make it snappy." Back with the investigating body, the jockey faced Henley. "Well!"

BUT the policeman had no solution. "I dunno, Jimmie. We'll do all we can for the boy. But Major Tyler—that's different. I expect," he reflected, "the old boy's sort of cuckoo. Had enough to lose his mind. Want to leave him—Ted?"

"Nossir," the boy asserted. "Somebody's got to look after him. And Mizzie Craig's doing enough—letting us have her back room and credit—when grandpop's broke."

"Major bets, don't he?"

"Yessir, down at Rayburn's. But our luck's about gone. We lost fifteen dollars already this week."

The bringing of food ended Ted's part in the conversation. Townley and Henley and Jimmie watched the boy attack the supper. Then they gathered in a corner. "You're right, Mr. Henley," Jimmie said. "I never could stand seeing a kid get the raw end of a deal. Went through it myself. Know what it is. If it's money——"

"I'm good for five every week," Townley put in. "Say, Henley! How about framing with Rayburn and giving the old boy a bet once in a while?"

"I'll match yours," Jimmie offered. "You lay off this part of it," he warned the policeman. "Got a family of your own. We'd be throwing our coin away, anyhow."

Thus, after considerable argument, was formed the close corporation of three big brothers to Ted Tyler, worse than an orphan because Officer Henley's shrewd guess concerning Major Tyler was correct. Hard luck and infirmities had sapped the mind of Ted's grandfather. And none could blame the Major; it was a line of conduct—punishing his grandson—far from his

thoughts had he been normal. But thereafter Ted escaped punishment, chiefly because of the conspiracy which Rayburn, surnamed the Robber, entered into cheerfully because he was that sort of mind. Rayburn was good-natured, fat and a bookmaker who took bets at track odds, accepted raids and welchers as part of the overhead loss and made a profit because the laws of chance, and persons ashamed to bet publicly, favored him.

A part of Townley's pact was a job for Ted before and after school hours. The boy was of little value, but that, the trainer overlooked; for like most men of an easy-going type, he attempted to overdo his philanthropy. So, left to himself, Ted gravitated to Sea Princess, the filly he had loved from afar, and became her slave.

SEA PRINCESS was brown, tall and wide between the eyes; moreover, she was unusually large for a filly, of the type adapted for distance running. Her easy, rangy stride gave rise to the hope that Sea Princess would be a creditable performer at distances greater than a mile. And she was tractable, without the nervousness of most two-year-olds. Small wonder, then, that the filly was beloved by the stable and worshiped by Mason Barr.

The filly liked Ted. She would whinny eagerly at his approach, would thrust her delicate nose forward, straining at the halter rope as he entered the stall. Ted was more popular with Sea Princess than Townley, than Sweet William, the negro hostler who had attended the filly from the time she became a yearling. Perhaps the idol of Mason Barr's stable read adoration and sympathy in the boy's round, solemn eyes. A strange part of their friendship was that the boy hardly ever talked to the filly; he would lean against the feed box for hours, gazing at her. And often he would spend as much time stroking neck and sides gently.

It was while he was doing this one Saturday afternoon that Mason Barr first noticed Ted. The owner had been away, none knew why, except that during the last week of October he would disappear for several days, to return in dignified black. Ted, always in awe of the man who seemed better fitted for church deacon than owner, attempted to steal away, but halted as he

saw Townley come up behind his employer.

"Who are you?" Barr demanded.

"Major Tyler's kid," the trainer put in. "Just giving the kid a chance to pick up some money. Needs it—pretty bad."

"Let him work somewhere else," Barr said. "I don't want children around my stables. Beat it!"

Townley saw the hurt look in Ted's face. "Wait over by the fence, son," he called. "Want to see you a minute." Afterward he accompanied his employer through the stable.

That night Townley told Jimmie of the incident. "So I tipped the kid off. Told him to hunt cover every time the boss came around. It's a dad-gummed shame. There's some things about Barr I don't understand."

Jimmie, whose interest in Ted had begun to decline, grew indignant. He had a natural antipathy concerning Mason Barr, disliked the man heartily although he was extremely loyal in the matter of riding.

"The boss needs a raking down," he declared. "He's too close-mouthed—too darned mysterious at times. If Barr don't like Ted—and Sea Princess does—well, I'm for the boy. A man's in a bad way who don't like horses and kids and dogs."

"But the boss does like horses," Townley reminded.

Jimmie snorted. "One thing out of three. He sure don't like kids—and I doubt he likes dogs."

LATER Jimmie Higgins came to learn that Mason Barr loved horses with all his soul. It was at New Orleans, where they had gone after the close of Kentucky racing, when a flu and coughing epidemic swept through the track stables. The three—Townley, Jimmie and Mason Barr—took turn about, day and night, watching their charges. They forgot Ted, left back at Louisville, with Officer Henley promising to keep his eye on the boy. And before the season was well under way at the winter track, Mason Barr had four less thoroughbreds. Sea Princess survived, although she suffered with the rest. Thin and wabbly, she started back to recovery. And it was a revelation to trainer and jockey—Mason Barr's patience and gentleness with the filly.

With something of the suddenness of its coming, the epidemic died out; so, two

months later, Townley met Jimmie Higgins after the end of an unsuccessful race for the Barr colors, and told the jockey he was to ride Sea Princess in the Crescent City purse. With New Year's, the filly, in common with all other thoroughbreds in North America, had celebrated her birthday. Under this arbitrary ruling of turfdom, she was three years old.

Jimmie gazed reflectively at the heavy track. "First start at a mile," he observed. "Thought the boss figured she couldn't run on a heavy track."

"Don't," Townley replied cheerfully. "But I do. We'll find out Saturday."

"Does she go in the Championship Stakes if she gets this heat?"

Townley nodded. "That's our plan."

Jimmie grinned. "Better fill out your entry blank right now. Sea Princess sure will run away and leave her field. Hates mud, but not afraid of it."

"Figure that way myself," Townley agreed. "But the Championship's a real test—mile and sixteenth. There'll be some good three-year-olds in, too—stout colts primed for heavy going. But I'm willing to take a chance for five thousand dollars. If I'm wrong, I get the blame."

"Ain't no worry then," Jimmie asserted. "Our filly will tin-can home. Leave it to me. I'll shoot her into the lead—and keep it. Let's go over to the—" He paused abruptly. "Hell's bells and rusty horse-shoes!"

TOWNLEY gurgled, beyond speech. His eyes bulged as a tiny, grimy-faced figure approached wearily. The solemn round eyes staring out from the shadow of a twisted, dirty cap told them it was Ted Tyler. It was a Ted wasted and tired, his clothing ragged, mud-caked and wet.

"Where—where on earth did you come from?" Townley demanded.

"Grandpop's buried," Ted answered weakly; "died kinda sudden. They wanted—to put me—in an asylum—or somethin'. I run away. Rode some—walked some."

Jimmie leaped forward and caught the boy as he lost his balance.

"I'm all right," Ted protested; "just hungry—an' sleepy. It took—so long—to get here."

Two well known members of the winter

racin' colony surprised their landlady fifteen minutes later when they alighted from Jimmie's roadster and lugged their ragged guest into the house, loudly demanding food. The promise of liberal reward brought results, but Ted, hungry as he was, fell asleep, utterly fatigued.

Fifteen hours later the boy awoke and discovered his two friends unwrapping sundry packages, the fruits of an early-morning shopping tour. Jimmie felt the boy's solemn gaze upon his back and turned.

"Awake, kid? Well, try on these glad rags and hustle downstairs. Mrs. Murphy's keeping your breakfast warm. Atta-boy! Say, Ollie! Them trousers fit to a T."

Ted's capacity for nourishment was astounding. Bacon, eggs, bread and coffee disappeared with swiftness. Between mouthfuls he told the story of his flight to an interested audience. "First thing after they buried grandpop," Ted explained, "a woman came to Mizzie Craig's and asked me a lot of questions. She'd write my answers down. When she left, Mizzie Craig said, 'They're gonna put you in an orphanage.' I got scairt and found Mr. Henley. He was mighty worried an' sent me with a note to Rayburn."

"Mr. Rayburn sort of cussed when he read the note. Then he packed me up in his automobile and took me to the station. Said he was buying me a ticket to Paducah, where his brother lived. Handed me an envelope with the address, and twenty dollars."

"There was a boy on the train, worked for Umbrella Mike some. Said he was going to New Orleans—bumming his way—after his money run out. So I said I'd go along, too. And I did—till we got to Memphis. There he took my money to buy provisions with. And I lost him——"

"The rat!" Jimmie put in. "Gave you the air."

"I had to keep on going then," Ted continued. "Walked out of Memphis to duck the cops. Walked two days, then got on a freight train at a water tank and rode all one night. Next morning they put me off and a sheriff arrested me. Aimed to send me back to Louisville, I reckon, but there was a boy lived at the jail—named Tom—and he unlocked the door at night. After that I didn't have any big towns to go

through—learned to hide myself in the daytime. I was here—in New Orleans—two days before I found the racetrack.”

“How did you eat?” Townley inquired.

“I didn’t,” Ted replied, “except the first day here. I found a dime—bought some bread.”

“Now that you’re here,” Townley asked, “what are you going to do?”

Ted seemed surprised at the question. “I’m going to hire out,” he replied. “Reckon somebody wants a stable boy.”

“Not twelve-year-old ones, son,” Townley explained. “And if anybody asks you what you’re doing down here, tell ’em you’re visiting your uncle Ollie Townley.”

“I’d like—to go out to the track,” Ted ventured wistfully. “Ain’t seen Sea Princess for a long spell.”

“You can see her in an honest-to-goodness race to-morrow,” Jimmie announced. “I’m riding her in a mile purse against hot company. If we don’t win all of us may be hoboing next week.”

“That filly,” Ted remarked, “with you riding, can’t lose.”

It was one opinion that proved to be prophetic; for Sea Princess, against a field of seven, led all the way in the Crescent City purse over a lumpy track. Furthermore, it was one race Ted enjoyed from a choice seat in the stands. Yet in the midst of an unearthly roar, the boy did not raise his voice. Instead he was praying, half sobbing, as he saw Jimmie doing his very best to keep the filly in the lead over a course she did not relish.

After it was over, trembling, he descended to get to the track where Townley awaited the return of Jimmie and his entry. He was standing beside the trainer when Mason Barr, eyes softened with the joy of victory, chanced to see Ted. The owner frowned, gazed at the boy curiously, as if trying to place him.

“That the boy hanging around the stable up at Churchill Downs?” he inquired of Townley.

“Yessir. Major Tyler’s dead. Nobody to look after him.”

“Ought to be sent to some home,” Barr observed. “How’d you like the way our filly ran?”

“She don’t like mud,” Townley reflected. “Otherwise she’s in condition right now to go a mile and sixteenth.”

The owner nodded. “Better keep her on a dry track until spring. She’s got the heart for tackling mud, but not enough endurance—yet.”

Another glance at Ted, more annoyance than disapproval registered, and Mason Barr went up into the judges’ stand. Later, in recalling his employer’s remark concerning the boy, Townley assumed that the owner intended saying nothing further, would tolerate his presence for the trainer’s sake. Perhaps this truce would have continued indefinitely if Ted hadn’t spilled the beans. It came about this way.

SEA PRINCESS had shown a disposition to tire early in a race. This was patently due to her recent illness and would require time to overcome. The Crescent City purse had brought out this failing, although the filly had won in what was regarded as grand style. However, Townley’s eyes had caught what Jimmie later verified; the filly had slowed down perceptibly after running the first half mile. Only careful riding and the thoroughbred’s stout heart had brought her back in the home stretch, to lead her field the last hard-fought furlong.

So Townley prescribed a course of slow exercise, mile canters to be followed by shorter runs at top speed. Because the filly fought to have her head with stable boys who used bad judgment in pulling hard on the lines, the trainer took a chance and put Ted in the saddle. His experiment was successful. Sea Princess obeyed the boy’s orders and, for a week, went through the mile exercise at a canter which any riding-school cob could have matched. At the end of this run, Townley would switch riders and there would be a brown streak skimming along the rail for a half mile.

And then one morning Ted decided to combine the mile canter and speed workout; he would do it and then alight and ask Townley if it couldn’t be the regular morning program. Unfortunately for Ted, it happened that Mason Barr chose to watch Sea Princess in action that same morning.

Townley, Barr and a gaping stable boy awaiting his turn in the saddle, were amazed to see Ted sweep by them, crouch farther up the filly’s neck and shout. The response was all he could have hoped for. Sea Princess leaped forward, hoofs pounding a rapid tattoo as she tore up the back stretch.

"Dad gum!" Townley groaned. "The little idiot!"

Mason Barr's face tightened grimly, eyes blazing. "I've said enough about children around my horses," he said quietly. "If anything happens before you get that boy off my filly, you know what it means, Townley."

Townley did know what it meant. For the moment he was more angry at Ted than his employer. He had an inclination to yank the boy from the saddle and administer a sound spanking. And that was exactly what he did five minutes later, after Jimmie, entering the track from the opposite side, guessed what was happening and halted the filly's wild run after the manner of a traffic officer.

"I—I didn't mean to hurt—the horse," Ted sobbed, hurt more at his humiliation than at the application of Townley's right palm. "I knew I could stick in the saddle—an' I can ride as good as the stable boys."

Jimmie Higgins faced the trainer, jaw thrust forward. "I guess that's enough, Ollie," he said. "I'm taking the kid down to the boarding-house." He flashed a challenge at Mason Barr, standing aloof from the trio. "And anybody that don't like it because I'm standing up for the boy can give me my papers—or swap punches."

There was one thing Mason Barr didn't want to do; and that was to lose the riding services of Jimmie Higgins. There was even a flash of appreciation at the jockey's spirit. But the owner ignored this thrust, turned and walked up the track, Townley following. After all, Barr had acted with justification; Sea Princess was too valuable to do otherwise. So Jimmie, arm about Ted's heaving shoulders, led the way across to his roadster and worked off surplus energy by driving in excess of the speed limit as set forth by legislation.

Townley was no diplomat, else he could have learned of the conspiracy fostered by Jimmie Higgins which had to do with the disappearance of Ted. Being clumsy in manner as well as in speech, the trainer merely knew that the jockey had moved from the boarding-house and that a coolness prevailed between them. Likewise Ted was seen no more about the stable. A dozen times it was on the end of Townley's tongue to demand flatly of Jimmie where the boy was staying; and each time the trainer's

pride protested against humiliation. After all, it was Jimmie's business. And if he chose to avoid discussing it, let him go.

Besides, Townley began to have a series of growing worries, chief among them the training of Sea Princess for the Championship Stakes, an event all too near since some half dozen sturdy colts, untouched by the flu epidemic, were entered. It was a circumstance which meant that Sea Princess, unless she survived the next ten days of training perfectly, might be eliminated as a contender. Mason Barr was afraid of a track anything but fast; he wanted his filly to go through the season without a single defeat. And to add to complications, the owner was summoned to Louisville as witness in a rather important law-suit which had to do with certain property he possessed.

So there was a conference at a downtown hotel, Townley gazing moodily out of the window at lowering clouds. Rain! It seemed as if a gray mist covered the entire world, as if there could never be surcease of this drab, mucky weather.

"KEEPS on like this and we're out of it," Barr observed. "Better keep Knickerbocker in condition for the handicap closing day, and enter Beryl and Shuttle in the shorter races, like we've planned. Don't care if you let the two-year-olds have a rest, until spring. But the filly—Sea Princess—watch her like a hawk. Keep her in trim—workouts and all that. And don't scratch her out of the Championship until you're certain the track won't be good. Don't want her headed by a mud runner who couldn't keep up with her dust on a fast track."

Townley nodded soberly. "Magenta and Tom Blair are the only two colts I'm afraid of. The rest—I'd take 'em on regardless of track conditions."

"We've argued that out—before," Barr reminded. "We just don't agree, that's all. I'm trusting you to carry out my instructions. I hope to be back Wednesday week—the day of the race. Otherwise——"

"I get you," Townley put in. "Afraid the filly's gonna be scratched. This rain looks good for a week. Bad weather in the North, I hear." The trainer arose. "All the same," he sighed, "I'm not afraid. But you're the boss."

Mason Barr permitted a smile to hover

on his tight lips. "I guess both of us believe in the filly. Only I'm not going to take a chance. Well, so long. Here's the checks for the pay-roll. And keep in touch with me. Telephone me if necessary. You and Jimmie made up yet?"

Townley's face revealed his surprise.

"Oh, I know about him and the boy. Always held out that it was bad business to act as guardians. Better speak to Jimmie. You don't win too many races with a dissatisfied jockey."

The trainer, however, did not speak to Jimmie until the third day after Mason Barr's departure. And then it was hardly a case of casual conversation. Jimmie had weighed in at the judges' stand after riding Beryl to victory for six furlongs. Townley, uneasy because he wished to make his peace with the rider, was approaching when a messenger trotted up and spoke to the jockey.

"SOME fool woman wants to talk over the phone, Jimmie. Seems in the air. Said a kid was run over—maybe killed."

"Ted!" Jimmie exclaimed. "Did she say who?"

"All balled up," the messenger replied. "I dunno. Better talk to her yourself."

Townley followed. He was at Jimmie's heels as they reached the telephone station. And through the booth door he could hear the youth's agitated voice. Remorse filled the trainer's soul. He was about to jerk the booth door open to share in the conversation when Jimmie emerged, face pale.

"Is it—Ted?" Townley demanded.

Jimmie nodded. "I gotta go, Ollie. See the judges and have me excused in the seventh race. Ted's all smashed up—in a hospital. Truck hit his bicycle."

"What hospital?" Townley called after the departing jockey. "I'm going, too."

"St. James," came the answer.

Through long hours of darkness, in the enforced silence of a hospital waiting-room, trainer and jockey awaited the verdict of the jury of science which gathered about a thin, bandaged figure in the operating room. There had been an operation—another. And now the surgeons, called in by Townley and Jimmie, were about to go. Jimmie was huddled in an easy chair, the trainer still pacing the floor, gazing absently at a cigar stub, when the door opened.

The jockey arose wearily. "Well?"

"Right leg fractured, possible concussion of the brain," the surgeon told him. "There are several minor injuries, back wrenched, body bruises, but no internal trouble; at least we think so."

"Will—he croak?" Jimmie asked.

"Can we see him?" Townley put in.

"No—to both questions," the surgeon answered. "His condition is serious, but not necessarily critical. He's asleep now. You can see him in the morning. We can know more about the chances for recovery then. Good night."

There was no barrier between Townley and Jimmie Higgins after the accident. They went away with a common sorrow, Jimmie to recount without anger his guardianship of Ted after the spanking episode. "Had him going to school as Ted Higgins," the jockey explained. "Bought him a wheel to run around on. Once in a while we'd slip out to the stable—after you'd gone for the night. Whoa! This is your place, ain't it?"

Townley opened the door of Jimmie's roadster, looked at the jockey hesitantly. "What time—are you—going to the hospital to-morrow?"

"Oh, we'll go around nine—ten o'clock. Meet you over at the track."

They went to the hospital many mornings, hoping each time that Ted would lose that sickening pallor, heightened by his bandages. But the boy did not change. Always he greeted them with his weak smile, but no warmth in his solemn eyes, which seemed to grow larger. It required no specialist to tell them Ted was not holding his own; he was losing his little reserve of strength. Townley would have filled the room with useless playthings had the nurse permitted. He was usually silent as Jimmie detailed happenings at the track. Only at mention of Sea Princess's name would a faint light come into the boy's eyes. And noting this, Jimmie elaborated upon the coming race, disregarding Townley's warning that she would, in all probability, be withdrawn as an entry.

"Can't help it, Ollie," Jimmie insisted, after their regular visit four days before the running of the Championship Stakes. "It's the only thing I know of to arouse the kid's interest. Nurse says it's a good idea. Maybe Ted won't be disappointed. Track's dry this morning."



"Let him work somewhere else," Barr said. "I don't want children around my stables. Beat it!" A hurt look came over Ted's face.

"Yes," Townley agreed. "But there's Monday and Tuesday to go through. And the weather map shows rain—to the west."

And it did rain, a slow twenty-four-hour performance which converted the track into the mud and slush of a no man's land. Not until Tuesday noon did the sun shine again, and then upon a shivering world. Townley did not go out to the hospital that morning. So he received Mason Barr's telegram and a blue envelope with stubby, penciled handwriting, at the stables at noon.

The owner's message was brief but illuminating. "Tied up until Wednesday. Scratch the filly if the track is heavy."

The letter was from Officer Henley, and it expressed the proper indignation of a friend who hadn't been told directly of Ted's accident. Townley was smiling over the contents when Jimmie drove up with a worried expression on his face.

"Say, Ollie!" he began. "Just talked to the doc about the kid. Nurse told him Ted's been losing sleep the last couple of nights, thinking about the filly. She said that she caught him trying to sit up in bed early this morning. Trying to see if it had quit raining. Ollie, the kid's mighty apt to drop out on us."

TOWNLEY crumpled the letter in his right hand. "What are you driving at?" he asked. "Can't the docs save him? Can't—oh, hell, Jimmie!"

Jimmie gulped hard. "Don't you see, Ollie? Ted's got his mind on that race—Sea Princess in the Championship to-morrow. Doc says it's psych-psychologic—something like that—got his mind set on one thing—see! Folks with busted noddles get that way sometimes, he said. Ollie, we gotta run Sea Princess to-morrow."

For answer the trainer handed over Barr's telegram. "I guess that trumps our cards."

The jockey wiped his eyes, unashamed. And Townley, feeling the crumpled letter in his hand, had an inspiration. "Say!" he proposed. "Let's wire Henley—get him to hunt up the boss—he's known him for years. Henley can put up the right spiel if anybody can."

So they sent a message to the third big brother. It was a remarkable telegram, comprehensive, if reiterative. And after it was dispatched, they waited—and waited.

They waited until the morning newspapers

broadcast the entry list, which included the name of Sea Princess, impost ninety-eight pounds, in the Championship Stakes. And Wednesday dawned, sunshiny and warmer. But no telegram. So now it was up to Townley. Perhaps he would have withdrawn Sea Princess without revolt if he hadn't gone to the hospital with Jimmie. Facing Ted with the news that the filly would not run, was too much. So the trainer decided to temporize.

"Well, Ted," he boomed, "the filly's picked by three handicappers to win. Magenta's the one they'll bet on to-day, with lots of 'em backing Tom Blair. But we know better——"

His voice trailed off as Ted's wide eyes remained upon him. Somehow he knew that his announcement had failed to get across. Perhaps it was the apologetic look in Jimmie's face.

"But—you'll scratch her," Ted barely whispered, then closed his eyes. The nurse, standing in the doorway, shook her head sorrowfully.

And then Jimmie Higgins spoke. "The filly runs, Ted, my boy. I'm riding her, see?"

The patient's eyes opened wide; and there was a light good to see. The sheet fairly wriggled as the boy twisted in his excitement. "You mean—you ain't going to let 'em take her out of the race?"

"You said it. I'm riding Sea Princess in the Championship."

Townley, too astonished to protest, stared at the rider.

"Nurse," Jimmie demanded, "I gotta have a line open to this place this afternoon. I'll hire a boy to phone the result." Then to the boy: "I want you to get the details, Ted. There ain't gonna be any doubt. I'm out in front every jump of the way, see?"

"Well," Townley commented as they climbed into the roadster, "you sure made the kid feel better. Never saw such a change. But how," he inquired, "are you going to break the news that she didn't run? Barr's ignoring our wire. You know that."

Jimmie shot his machine into high. "Ain't going to be any bad news," he replied. "I'm gonna ride the filly, that's all."

"You, Ollie," he added, "fade out of the picture. You're sick—indigestion, ptomaine poisoning, or something. You've put me in charge for the day. I'll teach Mason

Barr how to be hard-boiled. That puts you in the clear."

Townley shook his head. "He'd know it was a frame-up, Jimmie." The trainer sighed. "Worked for the boss five years now. Last Saturday the Brookfield folks asked me for the twentieth time to go to work for them. Reckon I'll look 'em up after the fifth race to-day."

Jimmie slowed the machine. "Hot dog! You mean you're stringing along with me?"

"Yes," Townley replied thoughtfully, "exactly that."

BOOTs and saddles! Townley, nervous and uneasy, was standing in the paddock as Jimmie Higgins, tight-lipped and defiant, approached. Outside, the crowd was already shifting toward the fence, seeking a place to view the running of the Championship Stakes.

"Well," Jimmie greeted, "there's a kid hanging on the telephone to report my last ride for old Mason."

"Henley's answer just came in," the trainer said. "Didn't catch the boss. He left for New Orleans a day ahead of time."

The jockey whistled. "On the way now, huh?"

"Yep. In a taxi, I figure, and coming like hell. Reckon he thinks we've scratched the entry."

Jimmie turned to gaze speculatively at Sea Princess. Magenta, across the way, had the sturdy look of a colt willing to fight a heavy track. He was a bit taller than Tom Blair, likewise a colt. There was but one other filly entered, a slim bay creature, nervous and short. "We can beat 'em all without pushing," Jimmie asserted, "except this Magenta colt—and Tom Blair. They're bearcats in the mud. There goes the bugle."

From the saddle he grinned down at Townley, a sheepish grin that Townley returned. "Gonna keep the filly on the outside," Jimmie whispered. "That bonehead on Magenta will grab for the rail first thing. And the mud's thickest there. Good luck, old pal."

Mason Barr jumped from a taxicab at the track entrance just as the paddock gate closed behind the last dancing thoroughbred. That act was significant; for once race entries are on the track, parading to the post, it is beyond the power of an owner to withdraw his entry.

However, Barr had not believed Sea Princess was still a contestant until he had glimpsed Jimmie Higgins. Whereupon, taking a good look at the filly, he swore fervently and began to hunt for Townley. Searching for some particular person at a race-track, however, is not an easy matter.

Townley felt his employer's hand on his shoulder just as the starter released the barrier which set five colts and two fillies in motion. "There'll be hell to pay for this," Barr promised, face livid.

"Better watch her win—first," Townley grunted, heart racing. "See Jimmie shoot her into the lead. Don't rush her, Jimmie. Ease her—good!"

"I want to know—right now," Barr demanded, "why you put my filly in that race. You got my wire?"

"Uh-huh," Townley replied. "Magenta's coming up. Don't let that colt head you, Jimmie! Let her out! Gosh!"

"I want to know——"

Mason Barr felt his wrath slipping overboard as Sea Princess, racing up the back stretch, once again shot forward, a length ahead of the persistent Magenta, himself a nose in the lead of a bunched field.

"Lord!" Barr implored. "Keep her there, Jimmie! Watch Magenta at the turn; don't let him slip by on the rail."

But Jimmie Higgins didn't know his employer was hanging to the fence, alongside Townley, his voice blended with the discordant roar sweeping across the infield. Jimmie was conscious of but one thing; he must keep the faith with a tiny, crippled form out at St. James's Hospital.

Thus the truce prevailed, trainer and owner united in a common cause—the bringing home of Sea Princess. And as they shouted, prayed, shrieked, Jimmie Higgins and the brown filly came out of the last turn and prepared to do battle in the home stretch. Mud sprayed the jockey's body, plastered the filly's satin hair. It was a sort of going she disliked, but there was in her heart the will to go, on and on and on.

But a dark figure pounded alongside, against the rail!—Magenta—rider whipping with each plunge of the laboring thoroughbred.

"It's his last challenge," Jimmie decided grimly. "Now or never."

And raising his body farther along Sea Princess's neck, Jimmie Higgins called upon

the filly. His whip was forgotten. No need for that; Sea Princess was giving everything she possessed. "He's waiting on us," Jimmie called. "Ted—waiting—keep going—keep going——"

Three judges, sighting along the steel post which marks the finish, decided that Sea Princess had thrust her nose ahead of Magenta, Tom Blair third.

Townley became limp, turned to grin at Mason Barr, then remembered. Instead he gazed reflectively at his right hand. Then he looked up. "If it's plain or fancy firing," he announced, "I'm ready."

The owner's eyes narrowed, body tense. "You've worked for me five years, Ollie," he said quietly. "I never knew you to do a foolish thing, until to-day. Suppose you tell me why—how it was you deliberately flouted my orders—why Jimmie Higgins was yelling 'Ted' every jump of those last hundred yards."

"Yes," Townley replied, still belligerent, "yes, I can tell you. Suppose you go down and get Jimmie excused for the day, then go out to St. James's Hospital with us. We'll show you a kid—all shot to hell—truck hit him. And he's about in heaven now because the nurse is telling him how Sea Princess just won that race. If you want to know why I'm firing myself, ask the docs out there. That's all."

"Not the Tyler boy?" Mason Barr asked, incredulously.

"The same."

They went to the hospital together, Barr and his insurgent helpers. Rather self-conscious they were, Townley and Jimmie reflecting defiance and somewhat more of regret. At heart, jockey and trainer were beginning to realize Mason Barr was a mighty good man to work for. Townley, chewing away at an unlighted cigar, was praying earnestly that his chief would understand—and forgive. And that, he reasoned, would be up to Ted.

They entered the hospital with the timidity of men unaccustomed to the silent, white house of the infirm. A nurse, recognizing Jimmie, led them to the second floor and to a closed door.

"He's asleep," she told them. "Miss Ellen, the day nurse, reported him snoring fifteen minutes after hearing from the race."

"He got the dope all right?" Jimmie inquired.

"I think he must have known—before the telephone message," she replied. "The doctors says there is a marked improvement. We are to wake Ted at seven and give him his supper."

She slid the door open and the three looked into the room. In truth, there wasn't much of the tiny patient to be seen, just a tousled head visible above the sheets. But he was most emphatically asleep, still smiling. And he was snoring.

Jimmie turned to his employer and grinned. "That's all I've got to say, Mr. Barr. Not much of an alibi, is it?"

Townley growled as they turned away. "Let's go down and get our bill, Jimmie. Time to check up on the costs."

Mason Barr walked ahead without comment. He seemed unmoved by it all, his old, uncommunicative self. Townley eyed his chief speculatively as they went down the corridor.

"Jimmie," he confided in a whisper, "we're sunk. Ain't no milk of kindness in that bird's heart."

"All the same," the jockey replied, "I'll lay you even money he don't raise another howl. I got a hunch."

"Hunch, my eyes!" The trainer was disgusted. "Now what in thunder is he going into the office for?"

Mason Barr was going into the office for a very definite purpose. He disclosed it a few seconds later when he demanded a bill in full—covering the expenses incident to the care and treatment of Ted Tyler.

Jimmie glanced at Townley's open mouth and grinned happily. "Want to take that bet?" he inquired softly. "Give you odds now."

Townley, however, made no reply. And for that, Jimmie likewise was silent as the owner, studying the bill carefully, laid it aside and brought forth his check book.

FIVE minutes later Mason Barr faced his employees outside the office. "You infernal idiots!" he began. "Don't know why I ever trusted my horses in your hands. Guardians for a boy! Rot! You don't know the first principles."

"Now look here, Mr. Barr," Townley protested.

But the owner put up his hand. "Listen to me first," he cut in. "It's a good thing

I happened to run into Henley up at Louisville."

"Oh! He did give you our message," Jimmie interrupted.

Barr shook his head. "Henley told me what you two should have months ago. That you were looking after the boy. I didn't know that. Thought you were just—well—you know how they try to break in young riders at some stables—stunt their growth and all that. It's something I don't stand for. But——"

He smiled, an event that transformed forbidding lines in his face. "All the same, it's a blamed good thing my horse won that race. I was wrong about heavy tracks. Guess we'll shoot after the best they've got up in Kentucky this spring—with you, Townley, helping, and Jimmie riding."

He paused, sighed. Neither Townley nor Jimmie understood the reason for that. But it was because Mason Barr was thinking of another time—in a hospital—twelve years before. There was no end like this—for a

mother and her tiny, three-day-old son had both passed away. And Barr had paid that bill also. That explanation, no doubt, would have cleared up his attitude toward the Ted Tylers who were twelve—and alive.

Back in the machine, Jimmie whistled as he drove. Townley produced another cigar, lit it this time.

"About Sea Princess," he ventured. "She might tote a hundred and twenty-one pounds in the Kentucky Derby—and win."

"Wait till the Oaks," Jimmie put in. "We'll show you fellers something. We're gonna come down the line clear out in front. I'll betcha something."

"Lot's of big races this spring," Barr agreed, "for the filly to step out and win. Watch out for that truck, Jimmie. Good driving. Yep. Sea Princess can do it on a heavy track. About the boy—think *we* can move him in a couple of weeks?"

"Yes," Jimmie replied, "I think *we* can."

And thus was Mason Barr, the fourth big brother to Ted Tyler, initiated.

More of Sam Carson's remarkably sympathetic stories of the racetrack are to come. The next will be "Weather Clear, Track Fast"—in April EVERYBODY'S, on sale March 15.

Of Blue and Lazy Water

By Mary Carolyn Davies

OF BLUE and lazy water
Our lake is built;
Of blue and lazy water
Where sun is spilt.

Of blue and drowsy water
That lies and dreams;
And when it greets its cousins,
The noisy streams,

Twines fast and firm about them
Its arms of blue,
Until they, safe beside it,
Are sleeping, too.

Of blue and lazy water
Our lake is made;
On pillows fat with sunshine,
'Neath quilts of shade,
It lies all day in slumber deep
And whispers sometimes in its sleep.

One Man Against the World

The Double House

Despite the Jury, the Popular Verdict on Dascome Was "Guilty of Murder." Can He Win a Reversal?

By Elizabeth Dejeans

Illustration by Ernest Fuhr

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

SEVEN years ago John Dascome was brought to trial in New York State for the murder of his wife Elaine.

The prosecution produced a body that was identified as hers by competent witnesses and was accepted by the defendant; it proved Dascome's presence near the scene of the murder and produced incriminating evidence; and it showed the existence of strong motives to the crime. Altogether the prosecution built up a case that damned him in the eyes of the public even if he could not be convicted—for the jury in the first trial was unable to agree, and that in the second trial acquitted him.

From that time Dascome had been a wanderer on the face of the earth—through Mexico and Russia; but now he was settled in Hollywood. Only three associates of his earlier life (besides his daughter Clarice) were still in contact with him: Herbert Colt, a detective, who had been in his employ during the trials and before; Nadine Navarre, a famous actress, almost the only friend who retained belief in him; and Randsome Rossiter, a dilettante who typified the general attitude of condemnation and ostracism. Besides these, two other people came to take a prominent part in his life. The first was Mrs. Karesia Kaime, from Russia, of whom he rented half of her double house—the half that she

had just finished furnishing for herself. She was really, though, Mrs. Randsome Rossiter, for as a dancer she had married Rossiter some years before, and then separated from him. The second of these new people in Dascome's life was Mary Bliss, a queer half-wit on whom Karesia had taken pity the day he rented her house, and whom she had taken into her service as a maid.

Rossiter, discovering in Karesia the woman he had married, found that she had grown much mentally, and was wooing her a second time in an effort to gain her consent to revoking the separation. Clarice Dascome had fallen in love with Rossiter in the East and remained hopelessly so.

ONE evening, after a long talk with Rossiter, whose attention to Karesia was now causing comment, Dascome telephoned, "Are you spending the evening alone, Mrs. Kaime?"

Her tone revealed a good deal. "Indeed I am. I have been enjoying your divan and my fire."

"May I come?"

"Do."

To Karesia, his very presence was restful.

"It seems a long time since I saw you last," he said. "You're quite settled?"

"Even to the kitchen mop. . . . Are you comfortable over in your house?"

"Yes. Everything about the place reminds me of you. You and cheer are synonymous."

Karesia thought that he looked as if he and cheer had been long parted. He looked grim and worn. "How is Clarice?" she asked gently.

Dascome looked away. "I scarcely—know," he answered slowly. "She can't go on—as she is—forever. Taki takes her meals to her; he knows her disposition well, and he tells me she is not ill, only grieving—like a dog for its dead master. . . . I haven't seen her for a week—I tried to talk to her, but it was no use."

He drew an inaudible breath and the lines about his mouth relaxed. "I think a kindly word from Mr. Rossiter, some little attention which would cost him nothing, might lift her out of despair."

The thought that sprang into Karesia's mind was: "Oh, if only Rand would turn to Clarice—free himself and me! She loves him and her fortune would help him in his enterprise."

For two weeks, Dascome had not thrust himself upon Karesia, but he had observed her coming and going with Rossiter; from the set of a woman's shoulders, her walk and general bearing, a close observer can judge pretty accurately whether she is inclined to the man at her side. John Dascome had drawn his own conclusions.

Karesia knew that Clarice would soon control her own fortune—ten million dollars. She could imagine Dascome's anxiety for her.

"I will see what can be done," she said.

"Thank you—very much. How is Mary Bliss?"

Karesia collected herself. "I am certain she is improving. She is losing the cringing, whipped look she used to have. She seems so contented, in her pretty room, with her sewing and her canary. I want to put her under a doctor's care, but I can't see how to manage it without frightening her to death."

"Why not wait a little?" Dascome said. "I knew you would be interested, so I asked Colt to find out all he could about her. He telegraphed to St. Catherine's Orphans' Home in Montreal. He made some notes which I have here." Dascome took from his pocket the paper which he had carried about with him for two weeks. "According to the asylum records, Mary Bliss was born

deficient. Undoubtedly she has been ill-treated and overworked, and I think she is hysterical. A physician would prescribe exactly what you are doing for her, rest and good food and an avoidance of excitement. If he were not very skilful, he might frighten her into an attack which would be fatal."

Karesia read Herbert Colt's notes with interest. "I am glad to have this. I couldn't quite believe her story, that she had been a farm drudge all her life, for she is so refined, as if she had lived among gentlefolk and had caught their manner and speech."

"The nuns give good training, Mrs. Kaime. Many of the nuns of St. Catherine's are gentlefolk. It is an old and honorable institution."

"**P**OOOR Mary Bliss!" Karesia said softly. "Her future marred before she was born. A theosophist would explain it, I suppose. The orthodox would say that it was the will of God." She smiled up at Dascome, her eyes robbing her words of abruptness. "When are you going to tell me your history?"

A flash of expression crossed his face; Karesia did not know whether it was surprise or annoyance or pain, and instantly she was regretful. Her question had been involuntary, simply a craving for greater intimacy. When he smiled it was a relief. "I told you to investigate me—didn't you?"

Karesia laughed a little. "I'm afraid I'm not a model landlady. I have never asked any one a single question about you—except yourself."

Dascome sat down beside her, his hand on the back of the divan, bent over her nestled back in the cushions. "You have much of the child in you—your thoughts lie deep and they mature slowly. You are guided largely by instinct and a child's instincts are very accurate. . . . My history, told by myself, would be too long a recital for one evening—it is subject matter for such widely divergent opinions. . . . But I have a confession to make. May I?"

Karesia's smile answered his; she felt so satisfied and at ease with him; it had been so from the beginning. "Have you broken some of my best china?"

"No. . . . Do you remember the black-bearded, black-haired, spectacled man who

used to sit in the Café du Nord and watch La belle Karesia dance?" He touched his breast. "That was I."

Karesia's eyes widened to their utmost. "You! . . . And every day a handful of rubles!" She flushed to crimson. "It kept us from starving! I had to dance or starve."

"I guessed it. I had to disguise myself; my life wasn't worth the toss of a ruble. I needed the joy watching you gave me, God knows! . . . Afterward, when I read 'A Dancer of Petrograd,' I knew who wrote it—the girl who danced and smiled, the skeleton of starvation clinging to her one arm and the grimy hand of the Bolshevik always touching the other. It is the truest story of the transition from Kerensky to Lenine and Trotzky that has been written. Your grace of expression saved it from bald realism. It is a gem."

"Then you knew who I was—when you came to my house!"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Partly because I love to save my pleasures. . . . I have a world of things to tell you, La belle Karesia—later on. May you always care to listen!"

Dascome was warmly flushed; his steady eyes absorbed her. Suddenly he was as personal as hitherto he had been impersonal; for the time being, he had slipped his leash.

It was a revelation to Karesia of the man's powers of self-control and concealment. She looked down at his strong hands and she was swept by the wish that they would settle upon her and draw her to him; in his eyes was the look that says, "My arms are about you." She felt the craving that knows no rest until it is satisfied. She looked into his eyes, her look said much; then she looked down.

But Dascome's hands did not lift. When she looked at him again, his expression had changed completely. "I must go back now," he said. "Clarice is alone." And he rose in his usual resolute way.

Karesia had a feeling of hot rebellion; he had remembered before she did how things were. It was Rossiter who stood between them. On impulse, she rose and brought him Alexander Karesia's photograph; she hoped he would talk of Russia again; it brought him closer to her.

"I found this in the storehouse and

brought it here because I wanted to ask you how you came by it. My mother was a Karesia—he was a distant relation of my mother's. He had such high hopes for Russia."

Dascome's expression did not alter. "Alexander Karesia. Yes, I know. His was the brand of socialism that Lenine's is not. He was a splendid dreamer and a good man. He was my wife's first husband. . . . She married him when she was very young—he died not long afterward."

It came back to Karesia now, the story of Alexander Karesia's marriage: he had married a wealthy American girl, a wild, ungovernable creature who had pretended to sympathize with his views; she had left him and it had broken his heart. . . . But in her portrait she had looked so sweet, like a flower! . . . How had she treated Dascome, Karesia wondered.

After Dascome had gone, she went to her desk and opened a package of cards, invitations to a dinner he was giving for her, which Rossiter had left. They were beautifully engraved and, in the top left-hand corner was a miniature reproduction of his patio. There were spaces for the guest's name and for the guest of honor. Karesia took one of the cards and wrote "Miss Clarice Dascome" in one space; the space for the guest of honor she left blank. She addressed one of the envelopes and put the card in it. Then she went downstairs and out the back way to Takimoto's cottage.

She called Takimoto to the door. Karesia had learned her politeness in the Orient. "Excuse me for disturbing you, Taki, but will you be kind and take this to Miss Clarice? It is addressed to her, not to me. It is in the wrong house."

Then she went back to her thoughts.

KARESIA had to answer to Rossiter for her act. "Why did you do it, Kara?" he demanded. He was very angry; he had flushed hotly when she told him.

"Because she's ill, Rand—grieving over you. I couldn't endure it. I wanted to do something at once to help her."

"It was John Dascome's suggestion—I understand it perfectly, Kara. His grieving worried you a deal more than Clarice's. That man was born a schemer and he is using you as he will any good material that comes to hand!" Rossiter was trying hard

to control himself, but his hands were shaking and his voice thick. "I don't want anything by the name of Dascome in my house."

Karesia knew that she had taken a liberty; she felt that she was the schemer, not Dascome. Rossiter's determined antagonism to Dascome angered her, yet her own heart told her that he had reason for his jealousy. But she had a hope and a purpose, and she must hold to self-control.

She spoke calmly enough. "Mr. Dascome told me that Clarice was wretched, but he did not suggest that I send that invitation. He wouldn't do such a thing; besides, he knew nothing about the dinner. I am entirely to blame, Rand. I'm sorry it has made you angry, but it seems to me a small thing to get angry over. Certainly at one time you liked Clarice very much—if I were so inclined, I might be unreasonably jealous. Isn't it better to show the child an attention like that than to have her do something that would make me unhappy and you remorseful?"

It taxed all Rossiter's powers of restraint not to tell Karesia then and there who and what John Dascome was. He vowed to himself that she should not remain in ignorance much longer. "I wish you did show some signs of jealousy," he retorted. "However, the thing's done and can't be helped. Clarice Dascome is the last person I should have thought of asking to a dinner in your honor."

"She won't come," Karesia said quietly. "There's no harm done and I think some good."

"She'll come, never fear—her father will see to that," he returned contemptuously.

"She will not come," Karesia insisted. In her own mind she was doubtful; there was no telling what Clarice would choose to do.

Rossiter drew a short breath. "Well—let's forget it. I have nothing against Clarice; I'm sorry for her. It's her father I abominate." He kissed Karesia then. "I wasn't angry with you, sweetheart—I was angry with him for working on your sympathy. That's his way—he's a good pleader and a still better actor. A superb actor, in fact—capable of outwitting a jury of twelve, if need be."

Karesia thought. "What an object lesson in what our marriage would be—no one-

ness, only the physical bond holding us. . . . He deserves something better than that." It was genuine affection that made her return his caress.

Rossiter was on fire in an instant. "Kara, you do love me!"

"Not as much as Clarice does," Karesia said.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, half pleased, half annoyed. "Don't tell me you're jealous."

"Of course I'm not jealous!" Karesia declared, and was not believed.

IT WAS something to have discovered a flaw in Karesia's armor; she was pretty much like other women, Rossiter reflected; it would be helpful if Karesia had an attack of jealousy. With masculine subtlety, he asked: "You wouldn't mind, then, if I said a word to some director that would get Clarice a chance in pictures? I'm honestly sorry for her—and she is so remarkably pretty. She will be a wonder, once she gets a start."

Karesia's first bit of guile had been involuntary; this was not: "Why—no, I wouldn't mind. . . . It isn't as if you were the director."

Rossiter went somewhat farther. "I'd like her to have a try-out somewhere, and if she proves to be what I think, a wonder, I could make a star of her—the public wants new faces."

Karesia agreed, but showed no enthusiasm, and Rossiter felt more hopeful than he had for some time. It was true enough, too, that he was eager to see whether Clarice would make good. He regarded her as his discovery.

Karesia flushed hotly when he had gone, carrying with him the package of invitations. "It's all so small!" she said to herself. "And I have always prayed for the big thing!"

She went up restlessly to her room and looked at the hills. Her house was settled, her typewriter looked at her reproachfully, she ought to get to work. She had answered a number of letters which recent publicity had brought her, and, already she had several callers, one of them an old lady who had known her grandfather, Johnson Keith. She was taking root in California soil, but work she could not; her own problem, her own story with the lives of living

people interwoven, absorbed her; she was restless, unhappy.

With utter absorption, Karesia watched Dascome appear over the hilltop, saw him stand for a few moments, looking down at the house, then come striding down. The first heavy rain of the winter had fallen the night before, and there was the breath of April in the air; the hills were blue and clear against a soft clean sky. She stood in the window; Dascome must have seen her, but he did not look up when he reached the foot of the hill, and she made no sign. Karesia held her breath until she heard his steps on the gallery; she had thought that possibly he would ring her doorbell.

But in a few minutes her telephone rang and she flew to it. It was Dascome, his voice as firm as the hills and with their touch of April. "Mrs. Kaime, you are well? I don't need to ask you. . . . Clarice went out this morning, looking a different being. I saw her making a list of the studios. . . . I can't trust myself to say all I feel—to-day." And he rang off.

To Karesia it seemed like a prayer answered. "Patience! Patience!" she said to herself.

THE ten days preceding Rossiter's dinner were crowded with what is called gaiety. Karesia did not feel it so; for her it was a time of stress and strain, a more complete revelation of what life with Rossiter would be. He was introducing her to a world which she found entertaining enough, but which, she realized, even if she had love to help her, would very soon pall on her were she constrained to it as a steady diet. She was a worker, a professional, a creator; she was puzzled at first by her feeling of loneliness when surrounded by people who were the epitome of action; friendly men and women, open-heartedly friendly and expressive and untroubled by the small social conventions that were utterly boring to Karesia. She herself was of the large-hearted type; she had the naïveté of the Russian; she spoke and acted without thought of the small conventions.

Karesia liked them, yet felt like a visitor from a far land. At the Ambassador, or the Hollywood Hotel, or the Sunset Inn, the seaside rendezvous of moviedom, she met them at play, for Rossiter took her somewhere to dine and dance almost every eve-

ning. He knew everybody; many stopped at his table for a word; sometimes, if a party was to his liking, he and Karesia joined it.

Some there were whose greetings he returned pleasantly enough, but who received no introduction to Karesia. Karesia met screen writers as well, a number of them, and, after a few exchanges of interests, felt again that she was a stranger.

She and Rossiter were dining at Sunset Inn, with no particular plans for the evening. They had come early enough to see the sun touch the horizon and begin to sink.

Karesia turned her face to the lights of the room. She knew Rossiter had been speaking, though she was only half conscious of what he had been saying. He had stopped abruptly and was looking across the room. Karesia's eyes followed his and saw Dascome entering the room, accompanied by a woman who was swathed in an automobile veil. It was not Clarice; Karesia glimpsed a darker face and red lips.

They were being led to a table at the end of the room and it was evident that the woman was no stranger, for she was stopped by several of the diners whose tables she passed and cordially greeted. There were dignity, vivacity and grace in her half elusive manner; she introduced Dascome, her hand on his arm, and passed on. The interest she and her escort excited did not seem to disturb her. When they reached their table, she swept back her veil and her odd topaz eyes traveled swiftly over the room; they barely rested on Rossiter and Karesia showed no recognition. Then she bent to Dascome across the table, talking vivaciously, gesturing gracefully. Dascome regarded her dark oval face steadfastly, smiling and, apparently, intent upon her alone; if he had seen Karesia and Rossiter, it was when he first entered; he did not look once in their direction.

Rossiter glanced at Karesia's widened eyes and a fugitive smile crossed his face. "So Nadine is back—Nadine Navarre."

Nadine Navarre! It had sprung at Karesia out of the open, the realization that Dascome's life might contain a romance, a reason for seven years lived apparently alone; for some reason, she had not been tormented by the thought of any other woman than Dascome's wife.

"She is a great actress," Karesia said steadily.

"Yes, she is—one of the few. A real artist."

"I have seen her in pictures, never on the stage—it's the penalty one pays for living in the Orient. . . . I didn't know that she and Mr. Dascome were friends."

Rossiter admired tremendously the well poised and sleepy-eyed way in which Karesia spoke; she was a thoroughbred, he had always known it; she was both vivid and controlled. "It's an old affair, theirs. It dates back to his New York days. Nadine has always been devoted to him and I know that during the war they were together in Japan. The report was that she was going to Russia—whether she went or not, I don't know. I know that he did."

Karesia was thinking that probably she had been quite wrong in her conviction that, beyond the separating wall of her double house, Dascome was thinking of her as she was of him. Suddenly, life looked blank. Rossiter would not turn to Clarice; her little plans would amount to nothing. Dascome had the companionship of a supremely charming woman. Would it end in her crossing the cañon, taking up her duties, the leaping spirit of joy, the urge to create, to accomplish, dead within her? She would be lonelier than she had ever been. . . . Before she did it, she would have to tell Rossiter the truth; in justice to him, she would have to do it. Would he ask the sacrifice of her? . . . She feared that he would. He was the type that decided for himself, and for his wife, which was all very well if the wife were adoring. But without oneness marriage was a farce.

"Do you want to dance, Kara?" Rossiter asked.

"Do you, Rand?"

"I'd rather have you quite to myself in the car. Besides, if we stay, I ought to go over and welcome Nadine to Hollywood, and I'd rather not."

They rose and over the heads of the diners Karesia could see distinctly Dascome bent forward and Nadine intent also, talking earnestly together, absorbed in each other. Rossiter had kept close watch; Dascome had not looked at Karesia once. Karesia felt that he had not; the mild seaweed-scented breath from the ocean touched her hot cheeks; now they were in the darkness, she could let herself flush.

Rossiter was saying to himself, half in

anger, half with satisfaction: "Just like Nadine! Advertising her loyalty in this public fashion. . . . The damned cheek of the jail-bird—showing himself among respectable people!" There was one thing certain, it had been a blow to Karesia. And there was a still greater blow in store for her; that would be the last straw.

THE next morning, more because of her intolerable restlessness than from any need of a morning's shopping, Karesia had her little Japanese, Suda, drive her into the city. Karesia wanted to fill in the day—Rossiter's dinner that evening was inevitable.

It was February, but a day of April warmth and sunshine, the acacia trees yellow with bloom, the scarlet eucalyptus coming into glory, lawns emerald-green, every empty lot, even, softly greened over with young grass and weeds. Roses were in bud, purple iris and narcissus and flaming geraniums in lawn borders and the air scented with orange blossom; California's winter-spring.

Karesia decided to have a manicure first, then do her shopping; it would fill the morning. She left Suda to extricate himself and her car as best he could from the traffic.

While her nails were being done she listened absently to the manicurist's plans for buying a cottage on the instalment plan. She became definitely conscious of her surroundings again, when she heard a girl at the next table say, "No—just an extra." Then something else, then quite distinctly: "Clarice Dascome. Sure, his daughter!" Karesia glanced at the girl, wide awake now. She was a young thing, young as Clarice herself, and completely the cheaper motion-picture type. The girl was staring at Clarice, who had just come in; so was the girl at work on her hand, and also Karesia's own manicurist.

"She ought to be something better than an extra," the manicurist at the next table said with conviction.

"She's lucky to get that—these bad times," the girl she was manicuring retorted sharply. "They say she has plenty of money. Why don't she keep out and give those that need it the chance? I should think that with her name she'd want to keep out."

Karesia's manicurist had stared until

Clarice disappeared. Then with a muttered word, "Mercy!" she returned to her work, her face grave.

Her manicurist kept her head bent over Karesia's hand, working steadily until the girl at the next table left. She glanced at her receding back sidewise. "She's one of the jealous kind. It wasn't her fault, what her father did, and anyway they acquitted him."

Karesia heard herself say, "Whose father?"

The woman looked at her with widened eyes. "Didn't you read about it?"

Karesia's expression was a sufficient denial.

"Why, it was in all the papers—seven years ago—the Dascome trial! He was tried for murdering his wife. They couldn't prove it on him, for he was too smart for them—he was a criminal lawyer himself, you see, and knew what to do. I was in New York when they tried him."

For an instant of glaring white, a flashlight focused on her eyes, Karesia could see nothing. Then she sat in a room that was magnified tenfold, a great space in which chairs and tables and counter cases were a great distance away and the people moving about were queerly unreal; conscious that she was seeing it though her eyes were closed. . . . Then the room was the same again, only everything looked bleached; the woman's head bent over her hand moved from side to side and Karesia felt a wave of nausea. . . . The woman was buffing her nails now.

It passed, and the woman was talking: about a lake that had no bottom—and a boy who heard a shriek—and a man who swam under water and hid himself. . . . "And John Dascome was in prison a year while they were trying him, and when the jury disagreed, he had another trial and tried his own case and got himself off. . . ."

The woman had finished. Karesia knew that she said to her, "I was not in this country then." She was not certain whether she could stand up, but she did. . . . She had no very definite consciousness of anything until she felt the cooler air of the street. She started to walk then and the crowd hustled her and she felt bewildered. She must have stood on the side-walk for a time, wavering and uncertain, for Suda found her there.

"I bring car just now," he told her. "You feel sick?"

"I—can't walk," she said.

He guided her to the sedan.

FOR a time, Karesia simply struggled with shock and a feeling of illness. Then, gradually, she began to think. Everybody but herself had known; the past took on new meaning. He had intended her to know. Rossiter had said: "God! I'd like to tell you a thing or two without leaving you to learn them! . . . Better if he had passed out seven years ago." And Clarice's strange attitude to her father? . . . She *must* know and from some source that was not prejudiced.

Karesia sat up. She thought of Takimoto: he knew. . . . Then it sprang into her mind: "In that box, only newspapers—papers of family, no other things."

A man at the storehouse dragged out the box for her and opened it. It was full of newspapers packed closely and yellowed by time. When she was alone, she lifted a paper and "THE DASCOME CASE" stared her in the face. They were New York dailies and were piled in order, dating from April 9, 1915, to May, 1916, papers of seven years ago.

The record was a complete one, from the first accounts of Elaine Dascome's disappearance down to the scattered notices of his departure from New York. Some one had compiled the record with care, date following date, not a paper out of place. The indictment, the trials, transcripts of testimony, yards and yards of description, comments, suspicions, facts, photographs.

Karesia was vividly imaginative; she had the gift of visualization to an extraordinary degree: she was not seated in that chilly high-ceilinged warehouse with piles of papers beside her. She went down with the divers into the Dragon's Pool; she was at Proctor House; she was in the crowded courtroom, watching the faces of witnesses, weighing what they said; she was listening to arguments, hearing comments.

How long her body sat in that warehouse room while her spirit roamed the scenes of seven years ago, Karesia did not know; her spirit returned to her body only when her eyes could no longer see print. She was sitting in a chilly gloom. There were patches of light up near the ceiling, high

windows from which the sun had long since gone. The light without was fading; in the room it was almost dark, like the gloom of a dungeon. . . . Yet she had not finished reading; there were papers in the box still. She realized it was evening.

Karesia tried to rise and could not; her body was numb and cold, paralyzed, only her brain alive. . . . After a time, she rubbed sensation into her legs and managed to move, then stand. She felt as if she had returned from a long journey. A man opened the door into the room. "We are going to close," he said.

She decided then. She took out the few papers that remained in the box. In the bottom of the box were a number of articles, some photographs, pens, ink-bottles, as if desk drawers had been emptied into the box. Some of the papers were badly ink-stained; evidently an ink-bottle had broken and saturated them. Karesia gathered up the loose papers and wrapped them up, papers and photographs, made a rough bundle of them. The papers she had read, she put back in the box.

ROSSITER had never seen Karesia look so regal. She wore a jet and sequin gown that followed loosely the long slim lines of her body, a narrow chain of cut jet crossing one shoulder, the other shoulder bare—a French importation that could be worn only by a woman whose body was as perfect as Karesia's; she had the rare gift, a beautiful back and shoulders. In her massed hair, she wore the one magnificent ornament she possessed, a relic of the days when her mother was the idol of St. Petersburg, a diadem fashioned of two dragons, their eyes rubies, in their spread claws diamonds. She wore no other ornament, not even rings. Usually she had color, to-night she was so camellia-white that her eyes looked very dark.

She arrived only a few minutes before Rossiter's guests. He was bitterly annoyed until he saw her face; then his complaint died. Once before he had seen her look like this. "You are very beautiful, my queen," he said, and kissed her hand.

"I feel anything but a queen," Karesia answered evenly. "These jewels are the only ones I have left—they and the head-dress mother wore when she danced for the Czar and Czarina. Everything else

was stolen from me when I was in Russia—and mother—and the Czar and Czarina are gone."

"But we are here, Kara. . . . We have only a few minutes—there is something I want you to see—upstairs."

He led her up the galleried stairway which looked down into the patio strung with soft lights, and Karesia heard the light splash of water and glimpsed depths beneath arches curtained with vines; the commingled sweetness of tropical flowers reached her. A door on the gallery stood open and Rossiter took her hand and led her into a little vestibule. To the right was a suite of rooms, richly furnished.

"My rooms," Rossiter said; "but that isn't what I want you to see."

He turned to the right and opened a door, touched an electric button and a suite of rooms sprang out of darkness, a vista of rose-colored lights. Lotus-pink and pale green and cream-white they were.

"How very beautiful!" Karesia said in a hushed, still way. All day she had sat in the presence of tragedy, seeing a face that never weakened, never smiled; ever present in her mind, the saw-toothed, water-washed cavern that had given up its dead. Here was softness and ease and dalliance.

"Your rooms, Kara," Rossiter said a little unsteadily. "I didn't want you to see my house until they were finished."

Karesia said nothing; she did not flush, her eyes were wide and dark. Rossiter did not expect her to exclaim: the moment he had seen her, he knew that she had come with her decision made. He had a vivid remembrance of how she had looked when he had taken her into the minister's little parlor in San Francisco, emotionally tense, camellia-white, as she looked now. A fear had lurked in his heart then, there was a fear tugging at him now. He knew, from the way she looked, that she was prepared to give herself; back at that time, he had had a confession to make, and he had a confession to make now; he was exultant and, at the same time fearful.

He was pale and his eyes very bright. "You will—stay—after they are gone?" he asked huskily.

"Yes," she answered evenly.

Rossiter put his arms about her, held her close. She turned her face against his breast, stood perfectly quiet. "You will

forgive me, Kara?" He was hot and quivering.

"It is I—who will beg to be forgiven," she answered very low.

He laughed a little in his excitement, pressed his lips to her shoulder. "Come down soon!" he said, and left her.

Karesia went to the window and looked across the cañon. Scattered lights were below her, to her right an immense expanse of lights reaching to the canopy of stars that touched a glowing line of horizon. She looked across the cañon only, at a light nearest the opposite slope of hillside, her house. Then she drew down the shade, then plunged the room into darkness. She heard voices below and went down.

IT WAS a dinner of twenty-four. Karesia stood near Rossiter as the guests came in, looking very much the mistress of Rossiter Hill. Randsome Rossiter's devotion to Sonya Karesia was the latest gossip of Hollywood and there was a double interest in the appraising eyes of his guests.

Karesia had not expected Nadine Navarre to be one of Rossiter's guests. She came with Clarice. They were the last to arrive, and it was evident that Nadine Navarre had taken John Dascome's daughter under her wing. She was cordially greeted as she made her way through the group around Rossiter and Karesia, and she paused to introduce Clarice to all who greeted her. "I present Spring to you—is she not?" she said with her piquant accent, and Clarice raised grave wide eyes to the admiring looks bent on her.

She looked spring at its loveliest: her little gown was of gauzy silver with touches of jade, a jade girdle interlined with silver, and at her breast a single blush rose. Her exquisite face was as perfect in its beauty as the rose at her breast. Nadine Navarre was an artist and she had evolved this costume.

"What a lovely child!" the man who was standing by Karesia exclaimed. "Who is she?"

"Clarice Dascome," Karesia answered. "I think she is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen."

Karesia was looking at Nadine Navarre, who was speaking to Rossiter. "Most certainly I would come, my friend—upon even an hour's notice. Our little Clarice brought

me safely here." There were touches of mischief, daring, and defiance in her tip-tilted oval face. "On one point we always disagree, you and I; nevertheless, we are good friends. I do not believe in extending prejudice unto the second generation—let us not quarrel over that." With her graceful French shrug, she turned away, a side-long glance bestowed on the meeting between Rossiter and Clarice.

"How do you do, Clarice?" he said, politely cordial.

Clarice said nothing at all, perhaps because she could not. She simply put her small hand in his and looked up at him.

No matter how much enthralled by one woman a man may be, he cannot see without a thrill the sort of thing that looked at Rossiter out of Clarice's great gray eyes: complete love and the pain visited upon love. Clarice was thinner; to Rossiter, who had studied her face so carefully, she looked older, graver, more like Dascome.

It struck Rossiter that there was no remark he could make, also that it was not best for Karesia to see that look in Clarice's eyes. He touched the shoulder of one of the famous producers and, when he turned, Rossiter put Clarice's hand in his.

"Nadine says she has discovered a new star in the firmament—what do you think about it?" he asked, and turned away.

Nadine Navarre, when she said good night to Karesia, looked at her in much the same enigmatic way as when Rossiter had introduced her. "I thank you for one of the most interesting evenings of my life," she said.

"You should thank Mr. Rossiter—he is host," Karesia said with a half smile.

"But, without you, it would have been much as usual," Nadine returned gracefully, and joined Clarice, who was waiting in the hall. Clarice had avoided a leave-taking; Rossiter stood so near Karesia that Clarice had not ventured near the group.

WHEN he had bidden his last guest farewell, Rossiter came back into the drawing-room to Karesia. He was very erect, his vivid eyes eager; never, even in his stage days, had he looked more splendidly a man than he did now. Throughout the evening, Karesia had looked as she did now, camellia-white. Rossiter had not

seen her flush once; she was unflushed now.

"Come away from all these flowers and the litter—into my room," he said thickly. "We're alone at last!"

He took her hand and drew her into the library, closed the doors. Karesia went over to the wide fireplace and stood.

He came over to her. "Well—Kara?"

Karesia looked up at him, her expression unchanged. "Rand—I don't know how I have lived through the evening. . . . I cannot—do it."

The shock of it flushed him. He had been so utterly mistaken: she had looked so much as she had when she had finally yielded to his pleading five years before; so emotionally tense that she had been drained of color. Rossiter studied her for long moments, through a hot mist.

"I am sorry," she said. "I can't help it."

"Why—can't you?" he asked then.

"Because I don't love you, Rand."

Rossiter could see her face more clearly now; he was thinking more clearly. He knew now why she had come looking as she did. "Some one has told you—about him, then?"

"Yes, I know now. . . . I heard it this morning, quite by accident. Then I read all the newspaper accounts of the trials. I know all about it now."

"But he didn't tell you!" Rossiter's lip curled in vivid contempt.

Karesia flushed a little. "How could he tell me such a thing! He meant me to know—he told me again and again to investigate him—before he took my house. He——"

"The damned schemer!" Rossiter said, afire with anger. "I could kill him for what he's done to you! I sat in that courtroom! *I say he murdered his wife!*" He lifted clenched hands, shaking from head to foot. "He knows that the biggest thing in you is tenderness and sympathy. He knows your trustfulness. He knew that you would never investigate! He's in your house to work out some damned scheme of his—I *know* it! And you . . . Oh, Lord!" He flung aside and laid his folded arms on the mantel-shelf and buried his face. "Oh, Lord! What an end to it all—what an end!"

Karesia looked at his shaking shoulders, his bent head moving from side to side on his folded arms, his congested neck, heard his convulsive breathing. She neither

moved nor spoke, but a flaming spot showed on her either cheek.

Gradually Rossiter gained a degree of calmness, lifted and turned. His face was livid, his eyes dull. "Well—what are you going to do, Kara?" he asked.

"There is nothing I can do. . . . But I cannot do what you ask—be your wife."

"Because you love him?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me why? A man like that!"

"I think—because I can't help it. . . . I can't help loving him any more than Clarice can help loving you."

SHE was vivid with emotion, quivering. Rossiter looked at her and visioned her in Dascome's arms.

"It's not true," he said through his teeth. "I can't go on without you. . . . He shan't have you!"

Karesia said nothing.

"What has he said to you? There in your house—trying to win you away from me!"

She stiffened. "He has said nothing to me, done nothing—*ever!* He has never said hard things against you."

"No, he's not honest enough for frank speaking. . . . You and Nadine, both at his feet," Rossiter said scornfully.

He saw her blanch, but she spoke resolutely. "If she has been—loyal to him—I think the more of her. . . . I cannot quarrel with you, Rand—there is so much that is fine in you. I am simply so sorry—to have failed you. . . . I am going now."

He turned his back on her. "Very well—go to him—but just remember that you married me." His voice choked. "I don't *trust* him—or—I don't trust him! You and that man! I couldn't bear it!"

Karesia put her hand on his arm. "I can't leave you this way, Rand."

He shook it off. "Let me be, Kara. . . . Go on back to your double house—but remember!"

"I shall try to remember. . . . But I am going to tell him I believe in him." She turned away. "I told Suda to come for me."

Rossiter stood, back still turned, lips bitten and hands clenched. He heard her walk the length of the long drawing-room—she had gone into the hall. Then he whirled.

"Kara!" he called clearly.

Her voice came back faintly. "Yes?"

"Wait a minute."

He strode through the drawing-room, met her as she came toward him. The lights in the room were very bright; the Japanese boys were setting the place in order. Rossiter motioned them out and they went with backward glances at his strangely white face. Karesia looked at him, feeling sick with compassion.

"Better to tell you now—if I didn't love you so well, I wouldn't," he said rapidly. "He'll tempt you—he's conscienceless, and you love him. I didn't want to deceive you—it wasn't that. That's why I told you that we would consider ourselves free—as when we first met—that I was courting you all over again. If you really loved me, it wouldn't matter—you'd forgive me and we would have married again. I was going to tell you about it to-night: that when I first came out here, nearly three years ago, I wanted a home. In San Francisco, very quietly, I got a divorce. For a year I've been free to marry. You're free, too. . . . Kara, don't do a wild thing that you'll regret as long as you live. You're a good woman—he's not for a woman like you. . . . It's ended between us—I'm sorry. There's nothing more to be said."

Rossiter turned on his heel; went into his library and closed the door.

THAT evening, as Dascome sat at his solitary dinner, Takimoto said to him, "Suda tell me that Mrs. Kaime come out from ladies' store this morning and look very sick."

Dascome glanced up quickly and he and Takimoto looked at each other; the Oriental's eyes were narrowly brilliant in their immobile setting.

"But she went to Mr. Rossiter's this evening," Dascome said after a pause.

"Suda say Mrs. Kaime tell him when she came out of ladies' store, 'I can't walk!' Then she sit in car and look very sick. Then she say, 'Take me to storehouse.' Then she sent Suda home and she not come home till evening."

Dascome looked down, his face grown gray. The Japanese moved about lightly, glancing now and then at Dascome's averted face. He placed the next course before him, but Dascome did not touch it. Takimoto

waited. Then Dascome looked up again. "You saw Mary Bliss to-day?"

"Yes, I saw. I take her some flowers. I go up to her room and give them. She a little afraid of me—not so afraid of Suda because he smaller than me. She call him 'boy,' always. But she take flowers and say, 'Thank you,' then shut her door quick."

Dascome said nothing, only looked at him in his steadfast, questioning way.

"She get better in her body, I think," Takimoto said, "but not remember just the same—eyes like they see nothing."

Again Dascome looked down. He did not touch his food. "You want salad?" Takimoto asked finally.

"No," Dascome answered absently.

The Japanese came closer. "I think better take her away, now Mrs. Kaime knows. It not so safe."

"As soon as Colt comes back," Dascome answered.

"He come soon?"

"As soon as he can—I've been waiting. . . . Manage to see Mary Bliss every day, if you can."

Dascome rose and Takimoto asked, "You not finish your dinner?"

"Just coffee. Bring it to me in the other room."

Dascome kept watch through the hours, until a man came up to him from the gloom of Karesia's garden, a thick-set, youngish man. "It's cold, Dennison," Dascome said to him in a low tone. "Are you fixed for it?"

"Yes. It won't bother me."

"Taki took care of you?"

"Fine."

"I'll go then."

Dascome went back to the house, leaving the detective to maintain the vigil in Karesia's garden that was never relaxed. He warmed his chilled body at the fire, then paced the room as he had paced the hillside, steadily, evenly. He looked at his watch, then went out on the gallery and walked back and forth there. He stood still then and watched Rossiter's guests taking their leave; the lights of car after car semicircled Rossiter Hill, then disappeared. . . . Dascome continued to stand on the gallery. He had seen Suda take the sedan to bring Karesia home, but she did not come. Dascome began walking about the gallery, not pacing evenly now, more like a caged animal, head thrown back, hands

gripped behind his back, circling and turning. Suddenly, he stopped and watched; headlights shone on the opposite hillside, circled down Rossiter's driveway.

Dascome stood where he was and waited. It was not long before a car came up from the boulevard. Dascome turned on the gallery light then. He stood back; he could not be seen from the street, but, as Karesia came up the walk, she would see him and he could see her.

She came up into the light, her dark fur-trimmed evening cloak wrapped closely about her. Then she stopped. Dascome stood under the gallery light; his face was distinct; the light fell on her face, dead white in its setting of dark hair and dark fur. They looked at each other.

Dascome did not move; it was Karesia who came to him, and neither of them said a word. Her eyes were fixed on his and curiously without expression, dilated and dark. Dascome opened the door and she walked into the subdued glow of his room, went on mechanically to the fire, then let her cloak slip from her shoulders. She stood slim and regal—the gems in her hair caught the flame from the fire. Dascome stood where he was, near the door, colorless, an unwavering gaze fixed on her.

Karesia could hardly speak, the hard fingers that had pressed her throat all day choked and hurt her intolerably. "I know—now," she said.

"Yes." His voice was entirely without expression.

"I don't see—how—you bore it." The pain in her throat forced the tears into her eyes. "You told them the truth—and they wouldn't—believe you!"

Karesia could not see the tide of crimson that swept Dascome, could not see that he was coming to her, for the room wavered and swam. It was when he stood close to her and she looked up at him, when the tears which had welled in her eyes rolled down her cheeks, that she saw him, his emotion, and his arms held rigid at his sides.

"Rand told me to-night—that I am free," she said simply. "I didn't know it. I left him the day we were married. We were never really husband and wife, and he divorced me. He didn't tell me because he wanted me back."

Dascome's hands lifted and settled on her shoulders. "I'm glad that you were never

really his. I've *hoped* that you never would be!" His voice dropped into huskiness. "I knew it would come to this. I've fought against it, day and night, ever since I began to love you—and at the same time—I've worked and planned for it." His voice was gone; his hands on her shoulders were burning hot.

"If we love each other, what does all that matter!" she answered clearly.

"I've no right to——"

"Suppose you tell me instead—that you love me."

"Love you!"

For Karesia, in those moments when they stood clasped, heart beating against heart, earth and heaven were made one.

KARESIA asked little and Dascome told her little about the past. On the night when she came into his arms, he told her with passionate earnestness: "Whatever have been my sins, before God, I swear that I never harmed Elaine—that sin lies at some other door! Throughout, I have tried to do as her father charged me: 'Do what you think the wisest thing for Elaine, for Clarice, and for yourself.' And always I considered Elaine's welfare first—better perhaps if I had not."

Dascome had changed from crimson to white, the gray look that had always tugged at Karesia's heart. She had laid her cheek to him. "You don't need to tell me—I know it's true. Now will you do something for me?"

"I would give you the world, if I could, my love."

"No, only this: try to forget. And hold it close to you, the same absolute certainty that I have; some day, in some unexpected way, it will all be made clear. All day I have had the strange feeling that the time is very near."

Dascome bent abruptly to tend the failing fire. "It may be," he said evenly. "What will be, will be." Then he had lifted and had drawn her to him. "But nothing that shall take you from me! This is the end of February; in March Clarice gets her money and I know she will leave me—there are things I want to accomplish, too; I hope I may be able to, I must do it. A thousand times in the last weeks I have told myself that I could never ask it of you, but I will. . . . Will you marry me then, Karesia?"

"Yes—I will."

Dascome was again the quietly resolute, steadily determined man that Karesia knew and loved, voice even and deep, a strength against which she leaned, a force that enveloped her. "Very well," he said. "You are mine and I am yours. The past shall not matter."

The past did not matter to Karesia; in the days that followed, its chill hand did not touch her. It was so much a part of her love, the thing that had brought her to him, her passionate sympathy. They kept their secret; during those days, Clarice was only a hurried visitor to her father's house, for most of the time she was at the studio and several times she spent the night with Nadine Navarre. The tests he had given Clarice had delighted Nadine's director. "That girl can do anything!" he told Nadine. "In a year she'll be starring."

"You owe much to Nadine Navarre," Karesia said, quite without jealousy.

"Nadine is paying a debt," he said. "She was determined to go to Russia and rescue her sister's family and I wouldn't let her go. I made her stay in Japan while I went. I helped her sister and her family of children to get out of Russia—Nadine's sister had married a Russian. I was going to Russia anyway, so it's really no debt Nadine owes me; but she chooses to think so. We are old friends, dear, Nadine and I. She has been loyal, straight through—big enough for a real friendship. Nadine is an artist first, a woman afterwards."

Karesia smiled. "And I suppose I am a woman first."

"Yes. La belle Karesia, with the wistful eyes—I love you!"

IT WAS late when Dascome left her, yet Karesia could not sleep. She was too completely happy, breathless and excited. The effect upon her was a tremendous urge to work; to prepare for it that night and set to early in the morning. She cleared her desk of trifles, uncovered her typewriter and dusted it, then began to take out of the desk drawers the things she always had about her when working. Her boxes of typewriter paper were in one of the desk compartments. On top of the boxes, was the bundle of papers she had brought from the storehouse, a slovenly package.

She decided now to unwrap it and put the

contents in a drawer; the papers were ink-stained and soiled, but they were part of a record and should be kept. She opened the package and took out the ink-stained newspapers, one by one, and put them in a drawer. Between two of the papers was a square of cardboard, evidently the back of a photograph, and there was something written on it. Karesia read, with a feeling of sadness and pity, its simple message: "To John, with love, From Elaine."

Evidently it was a photograph his wife had given Dascome. Karesia turned it over. In this photograph, Elaine Dascome looked older than in her portrait, cheeks thinner and eyes not so widely open nor so bright. The ink that had saturated the papers had stained the photograph, darkening one side of the face. The blot extended from the corner of the mouth over one cheek, across the corner of the eye and up to the temple, giving the face a distorted expression. The photograph had faded, the other side of the face looked bleached, an ivory-white. At first Karesia looked at it blankly, as one looks at an unexpected desecration, then with a creeping sense of shock, then with the impact of a possibility that lifted her to her feet as might a deafening explosion.

There are those who in any stress think first of those they love; of themselves last. Karesia's first feeling was an immense joy mingled with the tensest excitement. Could it be? Was it possible? It was possible! It was *probable*! Mary Bliss—this face more aged and sunken and wrinkled, the distorted expression!

Thoughts zigzagged like lightning through Karesia's brain. It was a plot against Dascome! That Atwell! They had not killed Elaine, they had dragged her away from the lake and had ill-treated her and disfigured her, driven her mad with fear. Then perhaps she had escaped them and had begun to wander, had grown old and bent, a prematurely old woman? No, more likely, Atwell had told her that her name was Mary Bliss—he must have known the half-witted girl who had grown up in the asylum in Montreal! The sentence, "My name is Mary Bliss and I grew up in an orphan asylum in Montreal," was not written by Mary Bliss, for she had helped Mary Bliss write in her little book "Sonya Karesia Kaime," and she had noticed that the handwriting was not the same. They had turned

her loose then to wander, knowing that no one would ever recognize her. . . .

But that *couldn't be*. She was simply losing her own mind over a strange resemblance, for they had identified the body found in the lake. It couldn't be; she had been startled, swept off her feet by an uncanny resemblance.

Karesia tried to think more calmly, but it was difficult; the strange resemblance looked at her out of dim eyes, as if dully pleading for recognition. Karesia could not quiet her excitement; think of being able to tell the world, all those who had not believed—to tell them: "You were wrong; I can prove it. Elaine Dascome is living. It was the body of some one else that was found in Crisomby Lake, a torn, decomposed thing dressed in Elaine Dascome's clothes. It was a plot, the work of those who were determined to ruin John Dascome and without danger to themselves." Oh, if she could do that, wipe his name clean of all stain!

THEN it occurred to Karesia: the handwriting on the back of the photograph and the handwriting in Mary Bliss's little book! If they were the same? Karesia went swiftly. Mary Bliss's door was not locked. The room was dark and she turned on the light. The frail little creature on the bed lay with her marred cheek to the pillow, and certainty piled on certainty as Karesia looked at her; pressed by the pillow, the uninjured cheek looked fuller; closed, the uninjured eyelid looked less wrinkled, the resemblance to the photograph more marked. She was not mistaken—the resemblance was there.

Karesia bent over her and called softly, "Mary!"

Mary Bliss was drowned in sleep—far away. Karesia spoke a little louder and Mary Bliss stirred and opened her eyes; then distress swept her; she must have overslept.

"It is morning?" she asked.

"No, no, dear," Karesia said gently. "You have not been sleeping long. I came to ask you something—the little book in which you wrote my name—would you let me have it for just a little while! I will give it back to you to-morrow."

"It has my name in it," Mary Bliss said, vaguely troubled.

"I want only to see how you wrote my

name, Mary—I'll give it back to you. I promise—I know how precious it is." Karesia stroked the rusty white hair gently. "Let me take it."

Mary Bliss gave it to her. It was in a little bag she had made and had hung about her neck with a ribbon.

Karesia was not an expert, but no magnifying glass was needed in comparing the two hands; the same uncertain upward lines, the heavy down stroke, the letters formed so alike. Karesia was absolutely certain now, the Dragon's Pool had never drawn Elaine Dascome into its depths; Elaine Dascome slept with merely a partition dividing her from her husband; it was indeed a double house! She must show this proof to Dascome at once—his wife was not dead.

His wife! It was the sudden realization that struck cold across Karesia's excitement; cold water dashed in her face. She sat down under the shock, gasping. Why! She had not thought of it—before. . . . He did not belong to *her*—he belonged to his wife! That was the law. But, she, Karesia, was the love of his life! No matter what had been before, no matter whom he had married, no matter what women he had loved, he loved her as he had never loved before—she was part of his heart and his brain.

If he were asked to choose between her and a name wiped clear of suspicion, he would choose *her*. He would choose to live his life through with her, rather than take up a burden, an intolerable burden, with the past solved, his name clear. She was certain of it. If she took him those proofs, she would be thrusting upon him a terrible thing, not bringing him relief, a joy. To him, as to her, their love, their future together was the greatest thing in life. And he had been acquitted of the crime with which he had been charged; no matter what people like Rossiter thought, Dascome had been acquitted.

And in what way would she be benefiting that poor woman in there? Dascome's presence was a terror to her; she did not know who he was; she would live out her life, not knowing who he was, who she herself was, anything about what had befallen her. Dascome's and her happiness sacrificed for an unfortunate whose only needs now were those of a child, food and tender care.

For, better than she knew her own soul, Karesia knew that, as she would have done by Rossiter had he come to her helpless, a wandering wreck, John Dascome would do by Elaine, his wife: grant her claim on him, guard her and care for her, own her as his wife. There would be no other; he would not forsake Elaine; he was honorable.

It seemed to Karesia that she was being torn asunder and, while tortured and blinded by pain, there were those who spoke to her. One said:

"You have not lost him utterly. You can take the half loaf—you are woman potential and he is a mere man, consumingly, passionately loving you. You can do what many others have done. Help him to clear his name, then keep your intimacy a secret."

Another said: "You have always lived honestly. You have made mistakes, but throughout you have striven for an ideal. Long ago, when sick with loneliness, you decided that the secret intimacy of midnight meant nothing to you unless coupled with the open companionship of midday—all or nothing. He is no different from other men—you would rather have his respect than all the caresses he can give you. The half loaf is not for you and him."

And then another voice spoke in her ear: "Hush! You see the grate over there? There are coals in it yet. It's the easiest and the best way; burn the proof. Tear out that page from the little book and burn it too. Then take the book back to Mary Bliss. No one will know—only yourself. To him and to every one else, you will be his wife and Mary Bliss will have all this life can give her—you will see that she wants for nothing. And you will not be depriving him then of the fortune his father-in-law meant him to have—of what value is it to her? Would you impoverish the man you love? Marry him and enjoy with him the things that money will buy. Look down that long gray vista, days, weeks, months, years—without him. This is only the beginning of pain. Think of him as he stood here to-day, his head thrown back! Of what use to anybody is that poor thing in there—think of the work you and he could accomplish together! And he would be all yours. . . ."

Only those who have won a victory over

self can understand fully those who have been losers in the struggle. Karesia thought of it as she waited for Dascome: so long as she lived, she would have sympathy for the fallen. When Takimoto opened the door to her, the sun was preparing to lift a gleaming brow above the horizon, but in the big room it was still gray morning; dead ashes in the wide fireplace, a chair drawn close to what had been warmth; an inanimate silence, the atmosphere of an unawakened house waiting for the light and movement of day.

TAKIMOTO had never seen Karesia like this, ashen as the ashes in the grate and eyes heavily circled. "Mr. Dascome awake, but not finished dressing yet," he told her. "I go get him right away." One glance at Karesia was enough; the thing Takimoto had feared in secret had happened; she had the look of one who has sat the night through beside the dead.

His face was as expressionless as that of the bronze Buddha on the mantel-shelf, but Karesia knew the Oriental: Takimoto was frightened. "Don't startle him, Taki. I am not ill—it's just that I want to see him for a few minutes—on business."

It seemed a long time to Karesia, though it was only a few minutes, before Dascome came down. He was flushed and anxious and hurrying to her; when he saw her face, he paused.

"Karesia—what is it?" he asked with the huskiness of sudden shock.

She came to him. Then his arms circled her and held her tightly and she could say nothing. "My love—what is it?" he begged. "What is it, Karesia dear? . . . Tell me! . . . You love me still? It's not that—"

"No. . . . I shall always love you." She drew back and looked up at him, face aquiver. "I ought to be happy—that what I said would happen has happened. . . . You are not simply acquitted, you are vindicated. . . . John, I am certain that Elaine is not dead. Your wife is living. It was not Elaine's body they found. I am—"

"That's not possible!" Dascome interrupted with tremendous force. "It's not so! . . . I know what has happened—they who killed her have searched you out. They have told you that lie! They have made you believe it!"

She took his clenched hand, smoothed it and laid her cheek against it. "No, no! No one had told me anything, dear. I found it out myself—that Elaine is living. I don't know just how or why they did what I am sure they did, put a body in that lake which was made to appear like Elaine, then treated her—as they must have. But she does not remember anything. She will never remember all that suffering—her memory is gone. She's—she's—" The tears fell on his hand. "Oh, John! Mary Bliss is—Elaine."

Dascome's face was suddenly wiped of expression. For several instants he said nothing, that steadfast gaze of his behind which his thoughts moved swiftly. He spoke as steadily. "That woman—Elaine? No, Karesia dear—Elaine is dead. . . . I can understand why you might think so; she may have said something that made you think so, but I am as certain that Elaine is dead as I am that you are living. . . . What has Mary Bliss said or done to make you think such a thing?"

"Nothing, dear. She is just the same, like a little child. She doesn't know who she is. But I am certain she is Elaine. . . . See, I brought it to you." Karesia turned the photograph over. "I found it last night, among some of the papers from the storehouse. I saw the resemblance instantly—the ink spilled on the papers marked her face in this strange way. It's as if you were meant to make the discovery; it has lain there waiting for some one to find it."

Dascome looked at it, lifted the thing and studied it; held it off that he might get a more distant view, then laid it down. "It's merely a strange freak of resemblance," he said firmly. "It gives the impression of Mary Bliss, and I know why. There is nothing in it, Karesia."

"But there is—it's not only the resemblance." Karesia turned the photograph over. "She wrote on it," she said with quivering lips. "And this page I took from Mary's—from her little book. I saw her write this, my name, in the book—the first night she came. . . . The writing is the same. It's true."

DASCOME compared the writings swiftly. Then he sat down, took a magnifying glass from the table drawer and carefully examined the two, letter by

letter. Karesia saw him pale, grow grayer and grayer, the color leaving even his lips. Yet he kept on steadily. . . . When he had finished, he spoke like a legal examiner convinced.

"I know her writing well—I think there is no doubt of it. . . . There must have been more than one man implicated in that crime. They kidnaped her for the money they thought they would get out of it, then found they couldn't carry it through and, to save themselves from discovery, decided to fix the crime on me, have me hanged for murder—finish me. . . . It's an entirely new aspect."

He laid the lens down, stood up and turned. He was as gray as the stucco walls of the room; his gray eyes with pupils contracted looked curiously light and opaque. "I went through hell because of her—once before," he said with steady emphasis. "What good will it do her, my going through hell again? Who would dream that you would make the discovery? . . . We are the only ones who—"

Karesia's answer was a cry. "I tried to think so! John, I *couldn't*! You couldn't!"

Suddenly he almost broke: "But—Karesia—I *can't* give you up!" The muscles of his face twitched; his eyelids reddened, pricked by tears. . . . Then, abruptly, he jerked himself about, stood back to her, and Karesia saw him lay hold on self-control: his hands dropped to his sides, his shoulders squared. She saw his whole body stiffen and straighten. In the silence, she heard his breath drawn even and deep, even and deep, like one in heavy sleep. "He is stronger and braver than I," Karesia said to herself. "He has decided—it took me all night to decide."

She stood and watched him. Dascome had begun to walk the floor, apparently oblivious of her, his hands gripped behind his back, head bent, absorbed in profound thought. The sun looking in now through the high windows turned his fair hair yellow, golden, like a child's, strange contrast to his lined, gray face. He walked the length of the long room, back and forth, many times; the place was perfectly silent, save for his steady, even stride.

Karesia felt removed an immense distance from him; it seemed unbelievable that his arms had held her, his lips caressed her;

that he had told her that he loved her better than aught else on earth; that his thoughts had been hers and her thoughts his. It was a foretaste of the isolation, the thought of which had so terrified her the night before. Was she going to be shut out from even his thoughts?

When, finally, he paused and saw her agonized face, then came and put his hands on her shoulders, it was like heaven opening to receive her; he looked so much more like himself, gray still, but with love in his eyes.

"I had to think it out, dear—the best course. This discovery changes—everything." His arms were about her now and he kissed her many times. "My love—my own love! . . . She's my wife still. . . . It's hard—*God knows!*"

"I knew last night that you would say that. You're a good man, John. I'm little and weak compared to you. . . . Last night I nearly burned those things. I said, 'No one but yourself will know.' Then I couldn't. It was despicable! I was going to commit a crime, then live a lie forever after. But you think more clearly, then do what is right—no matter what it costs. I love you for it—I shall always love you. Nobody can take that away from me—my worship of you!"

DASCOME caught his breath sharply. "Don't, Karesia! You can't tell me anything about temptation that I don't know. I ought not to have let you love me—my life has been one long temptation. Only a few minutes ago, I'd have tempted you, if I could. I do think quickly and I understand character—I saw it in your face, that I could no more tempt you than I could move the earth. . . . And there is so much for which I should ask your forgiveness—but not now. I want to keep your love—as it is now—as long as I can. . . . There are things that must be done now, at once, but when the long grind begins, the hopeless days and the fearful nights, like some I have known—I don't know then, how it will be. The great, staring public eye focused on me again! . . . In my misery I shall want the touch of you, the comfort of you, worse than a starving man ever wanted food."

He turned away abruptly and looked down at his wife's photograph. "Poor Elaine! And they did that to you! . . .

Well, I haven't forgotten my purpose!" He flung back his head. "So help me God! They shall pay for what they have done to you and me! The public eye—let it stare!"

Karesia felt that she had not fully realized. "It will have to be made public, John?"

"Yes."

"But it will clear away all doubt—you will be not simply acquitted; you will be vindicated."

Dascome was looking down at the photograph, his brows drawn. "Perhaps," he said evenly.

"Oh, John!" Karesia said in utter distress. "That is the one thing that has comforted me! What do you mean?"

Dascome whirled about. "Don't, Karesia! Don't agonize like that! There will be no doubt—when I have finished this thing. Time—that is what I must have, time. . . . Listen, dear—first I must establish my right to care for her—do it quietly, without publicity. Secrecy is absolutely necessary. No one must know of this until I am ready to make it public—that's imperative!"

"Will you tell Clarice, dear?"

A flash of expression crossed his face. "Yes."

"And do you want—Elaine to stay with me for a time? I want to do everything I can for her, John. I will do it so gladly."

"You have a big heart, Karesia," Dascome said less steadily. "No, I don't know yet just how it can be managed, but I must take her away at once—as soon as I can make arrangements. She must go to a hospital and under the name of Mary Bliss. They must see what can be done for her."

"Whatever you want me to do, John, I shall do gladly."

BEFORE noon of that day, Clarice came to Karesia. She looked as if she had wept the source of tears dry, but she broke out afresh.

"I am sorry," she sobbed. "I'm so sorry for everything. . . . You took poor mama in and took care of her, the only person who was kind to her—my poor mother! If it hadn't been for you, we would never have found her. . . ."

All the agony of the years of suffering

and uncertainty she poured out now; told Karesia everything. It had been a terrible shock to Clarice; her whole being was in upheaval. She reached the depths of humility. "I hated you too. I've been all ugliness to you. I don't deserve to be loved by anybody. Will you please forgive me, Mrs. Kaime?"

Karesia took her in her arms. "Don't cry any more, dear, please don't," she begged, though she herself was weeping. "We will be good friends always, just dear, true friends. We'll do everything we can to help your father. He needs your help, Clarice."

SOON Karesia Kaime's double house was empty: no Mary Bliss, empty silence next door, no Takimoto moving about the place, no Clarice whirring her car into action in the garage below, no Dascome striding along the gallery, then his ring sounding through her house. A great emptiness after days of stir and anxiety.

They had taken Elaine Dascome away early in the morning of the second day after Karesia had made her discovery. Karesia and Clarice between them had persuaded her; she was comfortable and at peace.

Dascome had brought Karesia home in his car. They had talked very little. Karesia had told him, "She likes the nurse—she will be contented there."

"Dr. Kreppler will make an examination as soon as possible," Dascome had said. "The nurse is going to see whether there are certain identification marks, a scar under the hair on the left side of the head and a birthmark between the shoulder blades—the likeness in the handwriting was sufficient proof to me, but it will be as well to have additional proof. From all I have told Dr. Kreppler, he thinks her condition very serious. He thinks these attacks of hers are not hysteria—something much worse. An examination will show what really is the trouble."

"How will they manage without terrifying her?" Karesia had asked.

"They will find a way." Then he had told her: "I have taken an apartment near the hospital and Clarice will be with me—when she is not with her mother. It's best. But I want to keep my house—your house, rather—if you are willing?"

"I like to think of it as yours, John." The sunrise had greeted them as they climbed the slope to her house, but it seemed to Karesia that she had never looked on a sadder sunrise.

"I have told Nadine," Dascome had continued, "and she is determined that Clarice shall not give up her part in her picture. I hope Clarice will go on—she is keyed up now to complete self-sacrifice, but she has no idea of what that will mean, the terrific strain. Elaine must have skilled attention, when even Clarice will not be allowed to see her. Better that the child should have something to do. I don't want her to give up her career."

"I think you are right," Karesia had agreed. Dascome had brought her to her door, but there he had stopped. "Won't you come in and let me give you some breakfast?" Karesia had asked. She had tried hard to keep the tears out of her eyes and had succeeded.

He shook his head. "No—I must get back."

It was hard for him; he looked it. Above all things, he wanted to come in with her. He turned away abruptly, then came back. "I must see you—for a moment," he said.

They had gone in and he had stood and had looked about him; he looked at the divan where they had sat so often. He seemed unable to speak.

"You will find who did that fearful thing, dear. I know you will."

Dascome put back her heavy hair, smoothed it and kissed it. "Perhaps. . . . I—Karesia, if a breath of scandal should touch you, I'd go mad." He put his hand under her soft chin, framed it in his hot palm. "I can't—come any more," he said. "It's beyond me. . . . You'll understand—and forgive me? . . . Better perhaps if you had never seen me."

"I think you're right. . . . But I'm grateful to God for the happiness I have had."

Then they had clung to each other, her clasp as close as his.

So Karesia's house was empty. That day she could neither eat nor sleep. In the evening, she went into the next house through the concealed entrance; it was neither locked nor bolted; in these weeks she had forgotten all about it, even that it existed. In the big room she built a fire and

lighted the lamps. The place looked as it had when she had first seen him—except for the bare spaces where her paintings had been. She had forgotten about them. It didn't matter; it was that gray vista that mattered. He was looking down that vista also.

KARESIA, to her amazement, found that Rossiter, when for Clarice's sake she told him the truth, was unmoved. He put his own interpretation upon the news; said it was simply additional proof of Dascome's villainy, and guilt of a crime far worse than murder itself. And he believed that Dascome had, from the outset, known that Mary Bliss was in fact his wife. Terror haunted her; if Rossiter took this news so, what would others say?

From Dascome she learned of Elaine's progress; first, of the positive identification that had been made; then of the results of the examination.

"It's a growth, they say," he told her, "the result of the injury she received when a child. In her present condition, she can live only a short time—they think another attack, such as she has had, would prove fatal—convulsions would induce hemorrhage. It's your care of her that has kept her alive. . . . They held a consultation—the case is desperate. They advise an operation—it's the only chance of saving her."

It passed through Karesia's mind, "And if she should die, there are those who will say that he meant it to be so." She asked as steadily as she could, "When, John?"

"In a few days. The examination had to be under an anesthetic. She has come out of it safely and is sleeping."

Karesia's thoughts had moved on. "Would an operation bring back her memory?"

"We hope so."

"Oh, John! Then she can tell us—"

"If she lives through it," Dascome said evenly.

"It's a dangerous operation?"

"Very. . . . But it has been done before."

Karesia was driven to the question: "Have you found out anything yet, John? Can't Colt help you to find out?"

"I sent him to Crisomby Lakes at once, Karesia, but he has discovered nothing."

What Rossiter had said passed through Karesia's mind: "I'll wager he has Colt busy covering up their tracks." Whatever Dascome did would be misconstrued.

Dascome was talking: "There was never a hint or a sign or an apparent possibility that Elaine had been abducted, yet it must have been done. Perhaps Elaine may be able to tell us. But it is a slender hope; she may live and still be little more than a vague child, unable to give an accurate account of what happened to her. It is best that you should know, for there may be hard things said. Then you will suffer and I shall be terribly sorry. . . . I must go to the hospital now, dear."

All her faith was in Karesia's answer. "I feel that it will come out right, John. . . . I shall pray."

Karesia's prayer was: "I beg Thee to help him! Help me to find a way."

In the twilight, Suda came to her. "I bring supper up here to you?" he asked coaxingly. "I have good supper. You not eat, you get sick."

Karesia shook her head. "I am not hungry. Go to your little wife in the cottage, Suda—and be glad that you have her."

That day Suda had rejoiced. "We very sure now," he told Karesia. "I think we have by and by a little baby."

"Really, Suda! I am very glad! . . . You tell the little wife I shall get many pretty clothes for it."

Suda was really moved. "I thank for much great kindness! My wife thank too, very much. She very happy."

"Perhaps we shall all be happy, Suda,—by and by. . . . In Japan, it brings good luck to the lady who is told that in her house a baby is coming?"

"Yes. Very much good luck."

When Suda had gone, the house was very still. Karesia went to the open window and sat on the floor, arms folded on the sill, watching the night come. It was going to be a white night, like the night when Dascome first came. . . . Soon the moon held full sway, only the cañon lay in gloom; a gently smiling night, the light breeze soft as the breath of hope. Early March; Crisomby Lake was sheeted with ice probably, snow on its banks. If only it could speak, there would be no more mystery; no bitter judgments such as Rossiter's. . . . Perhaps somewhere in

that mass of evidence given to the court lay the secret, a word or a sentence?

The night grew. The moon swung up toward the zenith; behind her, her house breathed stillness. Karesia sat motionless, her chin resting on her folded arms, her eyes wide and unseeing as a sleep-walker's; it was her brain that was awake. She was back again in the courtroom, lost to the present, as she had been that day in the storehouse, watching the faces of those who spoke, only now she was listening, waiting to spring upon the word or the sentence, the key to it all. . . . She lived through the first trial, she passed on into the second trial. There was nothing; at the end there was nothing that explained. . . . The trial was over and she had not found it.

Karesia never stirred. She began again, went back to the beginning. It was Jimmy Calhoun's story that had worked the harm to Dascome. She had read over what he had said, many times there in the storehouse; she could repeat it all.

WHAT was that he had said? "*Culp and his hired man* had got back from Crisomby with their load of hay and they——" Karesia clutched at the window-sill, head up-flung! Jimmy Calhoun had said, "The wagon road that runs between the two lakes and on through to the Culp farm!" And it was Culp who had found Elaine Dascome's shoe in the mud of the lake, in the lower lake! He had meant them to find the body! He had put the body there!

Karesia got to her feet. They would not support her; they were numb, as they were in the storehouse. It was after midnight. . . . She crawled to the desk and dragged herself upright by clinging to it; she was gasping as if she had run for miles: "I know now! I know now! . . . *John!*" She dragged herself around to the chair and the telephone. She called into the telephone, "John! John!" She could have been heard throughout the silent house.

The operator said: "What's that! . . . What do you want?"

"I want John Dascome!"

"What number do you want?"

"I want——" For an instant or two she could not remember, then the numbers stood out before her eyes, queer circles of light making them clear. She was fearfully excited.

Then his voice said: "Yes! . . . Who is it?"

"John!" It was a smothered cry. "I know who did it! Jimmy Calhoun told who, but he didn't know—no one guessed it! It was *Culp* and his hired man—and their load of hay! The man who swam under water and the man on the shore! When Jimmy Calhoun had gone, they hid her in the hay! She was unconscious—they took her to the farm—then they came back, pretending to help the others find her. It was Culp who found the shoe—in the other lake—he wanted them to find the body—he must have put it there. . . . Oh, John! . . . Tell Colt to find *Culp*! . . . Oh, I thought of it—at last!"

Dascome could not stop her; nothing could stop her—until she had said it all. Then she began to sob. "I know—it's—so!"

Dascome's voice sounded very strange, startled and husky. "No—no, Karesia . . . you're wrong. . . . Who gave you such an idea?"

"No one! I thought it out myself! . . . But, John—couldn't it be so? I *know* they did it! I *feel* it!"

Dascome's voice was more steady now. "We looked into it long ago, dear. . . . They loaded their hay at Bertold's farm beyond Crisomby Lake, three miles away. They were three miles away when the thing happened. When they got back to the lake on their way home, there were a dozen of the sheriff's party there. It was then they heard of what had happened and joined in the search. Besides, Culp and his wife are reputable people—and Best, the hired man, all three decent people." His voice was not so steady now. "But—thank you, Karesia—trying to help me——"

"He knows all the circumstances—he knows there is nothing in it," Karesia thought, and felt despairing. "I was so sure," she said to him, tears choking her. "I could see her covered up in the hay. . . . I had to tell you——"

"You did right to tell me," he returned. "Karesia, will you do something for me now?"

"If only I could!" She was still mourning. "I felt so sure!"

"I know you did. . . . Now do this for me, will you? Go and bathe your face, then go to bed. And, Karesia, tell nobody what you dreamed."



Dascome examined the writing in the book and on the picture, letter by letter. Karesia saw him grow grayer and grayer, the color leaving even his lips.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

167

"Of course I would not! But I was not dreaming—I was thinking."

"We dream strange things—sometimes—with our eyes open. Things without substance or reality." His voice was grimly resolute: "I know now of what you have been afraid, and I can guess who frightened you—Rossiter. He said his say to you, but he is not a tattler. . . . Don't be afraid. I weathered a greater storm than this. . . . Will you have faith in me?"

"I have, dear—every faith in you."

"Things are going well at the hospital, Karesia. I had just come back when you called. They will operate in a few days. . . . Now go to bed, dear, and sleep—and be hopeful."

"I will."

Karesia thought to herself, "It is his one hope—that she will be able to clear up the mystery." And she thought, bitterly: "Rand would say that he is afraid of what she may say—that that is his great fear. There is nothing more cruel than prejudice."

IN THE days that followed, it was Karesia's one hope that Elaine would tell them. "He will be cleared. He will be cleared," she kept saying to herself. She said it when she went to bed, and it enabled her to sleep. She said it when she waked in the morning, and it enabled her to fill the day.

And every day Dascome telephoned; nothing about himself, about Elaine. He kept Karesia's mind on the event for which the physicians were preparing with all the care possible to science. He told her that, in the beginning, Elaine had asked frequently about Karesia, but that now the impression had faded; Clarice had taken Karesia's place; she looked upon Clarice now as her guardian; that she seemed content. The doctors counted much on Elaine's capacity for physical endurance; they were very much interested in the case; the operation was a very delicate and difficult one.

Clarice also telephoned. She had been able to go to the studio several times. "I didn't know that Madame Navarre was a friend of father's," she told Karesia. "She's known him for a long time. She says father's one of the best men she ever knew—that he's so unselfish. She looks very grave when she speaks of mama—I think she's afraid it may not come out well. But, oh,

Mrs. Kaime! Think how wonderful it will be if she gets well and we can make her pretty again, she and father together and things happy, not as they used to be!"

With an intolerable ache in her throat, Karesia spoke her word of cheer. Evidently Clarice had no suspicion of how matters had been between her and Dascome. Karesia wondered whether Nadine Navarre knew. She knew why Nadine looked "very grave"; she feared for Dascome, as she herself feared for him, a reopening of that horrible case; and, too, she knew that only duty and pity would hold Dascome to Elaine.

Her fear for him drove her to beg: "John, if ever—if ever you feel that brave will of yours going, will you promise to come to me? . . . Please promise me!"

"I told you not to be afraid for me, Karesia."

"But please promise me."

"I shall come to you as straight as a child goes to its mother. . . And, if you need me, you will send for me?"

"Yes, I promise."

ON THE day of the operation Karesia waited through the morning, not moving far from the telephone. It was two o'clock before she heard his voice, steady as ever. "She survived it, Karesia. There has been no collapse."

"She can't speak yet?"

"Not yet. The great danger is hemorrhage. It was worse than they supposed—it was a marvelous thing they did. They hope for the best."

"John—you'll tell me what she says when she wakes?"

"Yes, at once."

Karesia waited through the evening, until nine o'clock. She had almost given up hope of a message, when her telephone rang sharply. Dascome's voice was so husky that she could scarcely hear him; she could not tell whether it was relief or an overwhelming disappointment; he was tense with some emotion.

He said: "Karesia? . . . Clarice and I were there—and some one to take down what she said. Elaine asked first, 'Where am I?' The nurse said: 'In a good hospital, Mrs. Dascome. You have been very ill.' Then Elaine said: 'He hit me—on the head. My head hurts.' The nurse asked, as she had been instructed to ask, 'Who hit you,

Mrs. Dascome?' Then Elaine answered: 'I don't know. He had his face covered. It was a big tall man. He took hold of me and I screamed to John.' She showed excitement then—they tried to quiet her. It was Clarice who saved her, she pushed every one aside. 'Mama, it's Clarice!' she said. 'I'm here with you! Feel my hand?' Then Elaine quieted. She said nothing more, only 'Clarice, Clarice,' several times. She was too weak to talk—she went to sleep, holding Clarice's hand. They think it will be"—Dascome's voice sank to almost nothing—"a complete—recovery. . . . Don't worry!"

For a few instants, Karesia could say nothing, for it had struck her with the force of a blow; they would say, just as Rossiter had said, that Dascome had a confederate. "I screamed to John." They would say that Dascome was there, that he had plotted the whole thing. But her greatest fear was the effect upon Dascome. She had never heard his voice like this, worn threadbare—as if he were frightened. Yet she must not show her frantic anxiety, for he would collapse!

It was her immense love for him that kept her voice steady. "She will tell more—when she is better—the whole truth. I am not afraid."

"Yes. . . . Perhaps," he said in the same thick, smothered way. "I am at the apartment—some one is at the door—don't telephone. Good-by, Karesia." He ended hurriedly.

Karesia sat and twisted her hands. "They have come to arrest him. What shall I do! What *shall* I do!"

HOW long she had walked the floor, wringing her hands, talking aloud to herself in frantic misery, Karesia did not know. It was the pealing of her front door-bell that brought her to a pause. It rang again. "They have come to question me," she said to herself and, suddenly, she was desperately calm.

It was after ten o'clock. She went down unhurriedly, turning on the lights as she went. She smoothed her hair and tried to rub color into her face. "They will try to prove that he knew his wife was here," she thought to herself. Then she opened the door.

It was Herbert Colt who stood there,

massive of jaw and shoulders. Karesia was utterly incapable of speech.

"It's Herbert Colt, Mrs. Kaime—you don't know me, do you, now I'm not disguised?"

"Yes—I do," Karesia said mechanically.

He stepped in. "J. D.—Mr. Dascome, I mean—couldn't come." He put down a long parcel he was carrying, then offered his hand. "I want to shake hands with you, first of all," he said in an odd sort of way. "I take my hat off to you." Evidently it reminded him, for he removed his head covering.

Karesia gave him her hand, not knowing in the least what she was doing. "John—Mr. Dascome—he's ill?" she asked.

"No, he's not sick! No, he's all right, Mrs. Kaime! Just sit down. There! J. D. couldn't come, that's all—he couldn't come."

"Then something has happened to him?"

"Nothing to mourn over," Colt said grimly.

"Mr. Colt! You've found who did it!"

"Yes, madam. . . . Now, Mrs. Kaime, I can't tell it to you in one sentence. This thing's going to make a big stir, and there are those who may come to you with questions, so you had ought to know all of it."

"But his name is cleared!"

"You just listen and judge whether it is," he returned. "I know J. D. like no one else does! Now let me tell it to you straight. J. D. says you know about those trials, so all I've got to say about them is that he told them God's truth and so did I. Now I'm going to tell you things that I didn't know until this evening. We had our suspicions, J. D. and I, but we couldn't prove a thing; not a thing we could lay our hands on during those trials. And for these six years we've known very little more than when J. D. walked out of the courtroom. To-night, we have the story straight—it's true, murder will out."

"But there was no murder!" Karesia interrupted, breathless and wide-eyed.

"Yes, there was; that's why some one will hang—just you listen to what we know to-night! . . . I'm going back to the beginning: Elaine Proctor married Alexander Karesia. There was a strike on in Proctorville, and Karesia was trying to talk sense to those mill-hands—he was opposed to violence. A crook called Bain Atwell—he

had a dozen other aliases—turned into Proctorville seeking what he could find. There was a nasty Red element there. They drew Elaine Karesia into their toils. She gave them money and attended their meetings—if it hadn't been that she was Proctor's daughter and barely eighteen, she'd have been nabbed. She ran to her father for protection. The whole thing broke Alexander Karesia's heart. Meta Thail was in their house; she knew all about it, Elaine Karesia's goings on.

"Atwell looked on and marked Elaine as good pickings, for later on. Then he slipped out. It wasn't long before J. D. married her. J. D. didn't know what he'd married; he fell in love with her face. Mr. Proctor was in Europe when J. D. married her, or Mr. Proctor would have told him that Elaine was queer—Proctor was an honest man. It was Mrs. Ormsby who furthered the match and said nothing, and J. D. was twenty-four and in a hurry—like most young fellows.

"Then Atwell set to work. First Atwell tried to blackmail J. D. He threatened J. D., but the thing that kept J. D. from turning Atwell over to the law was Atwell's threat that, if J. D. had him arrested, he would tell all that Proctorville history of Mrs. Dascome's. What J. D. did was to beat him nearly into a pulp. We saw that he cleared from New York and kept out.

"But Atwell managed to work from a distance. He knew Orlaf Thail, Meta's husband. Thail had married her and then deserted her. Thail had turned crook; he and Atwell had done various jobs together. Thail was a big innocent-looking Swede, but a bad lot. Meta was madly in love with him. Atwell got Thail to write to Meta that if she would come to New York and get a position in Dascome's house and earn good wages, he, Thail, would live with her again; but she must keep it a secret. And that's what Meta did. She had her time off when she saw her husband—Atwell put a spy in Dascome's house.

"**Y**OU may imagine that things hadn't gone well in that household—Mrs. Dascome couldn't help her fits of rage. J. D. was awfully fond of his child and she was jealous and turned against him. Meta reported all that to Thail. Then Atwell began writing letters to Mrs. Dascome. He

said that J. D. was looking for an excuse to get rid of her and take Clarice, that what J. D. wanted was proof that he could use against her, and he told her that he could furnish J. D. with what he wanted, her career in Proctorville. More than that, he manufactured an ugly story which he told her would give J. D. a divorce and the custody of Clarice. He told her that Mr. Proctor was so disgusted with her conduct that he would not give her any help.

"It was beastly; Atwell got her allowance and he paid part of it to Thail. How much Meta knew of all this, it's hard to say—she must have known of some of it. Certainly she kept Mrs. Dascome in a state of rage against J. D. What Atwell wanted was a big sum down. He wrote Mrs. Dascome that if she could get her father to settle a sum on her and she would divide with him, he would turn over to her written information he had. Her father wouldn't trust her with money—he thought she was crazy. Atwell kept on urging and threatening and she left J. D. and went to the hotel. She was frantic; she didn't know what she was doing. It was Meta who sent the telegram to Mr. Proctor, at the suggestion of Thail, and signed it, 'Elaine.'

"It shocked Mr. Proctor into a heart attack. Then Atwell got his big idea: Mr. Proctor would die; Elaine was one of his heirs; he could make big money. Some time before, Atwell had gone to Proctorville; he was in hiding there. Then, on the fifth of April, shortly after he heard of Mr. Proctor's illness, suddenly Thail sent him word from New York that that morning J. D. had come to the hotel and had become reconciled to Mrs. Dascome and the two were going to Crisomby Lakes, and that J. D. had discharged Meta. There is no doubt that J. D.'s offer to give up Clarice cut the ground from under Mrs. Dascome. She knew that Meta had lied to her—I think she went to Crisomby Lakes utterly dazed, not knowing what to do.

"Then Atwell acted quickly, for he was afraid that finally Mrs. Dascome would confess the whole thing to J. D. He had no intention of going to Crisomby Lakes, but he had his agent there, on the spot, for Thail was there. For a year or more, Thail had been lying low at Crisomby Lakes and sneaking to New York at intervals to see Meta and for a little whirl with his own

kind; he was wanted for several things, and he had to lie low.

"As soon as Mrs. Dascome and J. D. arrived at Crisomby Lakes, Thail got the message to her that if she would meet Atwell at Dragon's Pool that afternoon and bring with her any letters that she had of his, he would turn over to her what papers he had and would not trouble her again—that he was leaving the country. Then Thail received her note saying what time she would be at Dragon's Pool; it was quite evident that she hadn't told J. D. anything. Then Atwell, from Proctorville, sends J. D. that telegram, saying that Mr. Proctor was dying—he wanted to get J. D. away from Crisomby Lakes and give Thail his chance."

Colt had caught himself up. His long rough-featured face had flushed gradually until he was crimson. He brought his heavy fist down on his knee with a force that made articles in the room rattle.

"I've had to do with a good many criminals, but he was the *damnedest*! His kind use crooks not so clever as he—and pockets the money. Smooth! Who knows what that poor woman had in her mind when she asked J. D. to take her out on the lake? I guess to show Atwell—she thought she was going to meet Atwell—that she had a protector not so far away. She had reasons enough to fear Atwell. It turned out a cruel thing for J. D.! Hell take them!" He lost his breath.

Karesia sat hands gripped. "Yes—Mr. Colt—yes. Go on!"

"Well—this is what happened, Mrs. Kaime. She brought the boat under the bank just behind Dragon's Pool. They kept her waiting until they were sure J. D. was out of hearing; then a big man, Thail, with a handkerchief drawn over his face, jumped down into her boat and grabbed her, tried to cover her mouth. But she gave one scream and Jimmy Calhoun heard and yelled. Then Thail struck her, on the side of the head, where she'd been hurt before and she dropped like lead. He lifted her up then to the other man in the bushes, both so scared they didn't know what they were doing. The boat shoved out from under Thail, he couldn't catch the bank, and he took a header—swam under water, like Jimmy said. The other man left her in the bushes and ran. They——"

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

"YOU mean—they meant to kidnap her, so as to ask a ransom? That Atwell——"

"Yes—sure! I thought I'd said it! Atwell thought the game was up, she'd tell J. D. sooner or later, so he hit on that plan. Mrs. Kaime, Thail and Culp—yes, madam, Culp!—they met at the edge of the tangle, nearest to Crisomby village, where they had their hay-rack drawn up. They'd left the Culp farm over an hour before like Mrs. Culp told Jimmy Calhoun. Yes, madam, it was the way you said, only their hay-rack was going instead of coming. You gave us the hint. It's owing to you J. D. stands a cleared man——"

"Oh, Mr. Colt—I'm so glad!" The tears rolled down Karesia's cheeks. "Then they went back and got her? Poor Elaine!"

"That's what they did. Culp was a timid man. Mrs. Culp was Thail's sister, like to him—a big handsome woman who ruled Culp. Atwell had tempted them with hope of a million ransom money. Thail was the coolest—he damned Culp for leaving Mrs. Dascome there in the underbrush to tell tales on them. The boy had gone—they had time to make their get-away. So Thail went back and got her. She was unconscious but breathing. They had a tarpaulin in the hay-rack and they covered her up. They'd intended to go back to the farm and leave her with Mrs. Culp—they had a place ready there for her. They daren't do that now, for the boy had gone that way. So they went on through the fields to Bertold's and loaded their hay—gave Thail's clothes a chance to dry, too.

"Culp said, 'If she comes to?'"

"Thail said, 'Then I'll fix her.'"

"Culp said, 'If she dies, it's murder.'"

"Thail said: 'I've took care of that. I slid her cape into Dragon's Pool. Dascome's hat's floating there—he'd be the one accused. I've thought it out, we're safe any way you fix it. We may get a chance at the ransom, after all.'"

"So they loaded their hay with her on the ground wrapped in the tarpaulin. When they were ready, they fixed a place in the hay and drove on home, going through the village. There they heard of the alarm and that the sheriff was at the lake. She was still breathing, just unconscious. There's a big attic room to that farmhouse, Mrs. Kaime, and that's where they kept her.

She was unconscious for three days, and they did the best they could for her. They didn't want murder on their heads; besides, there was the hope that Atwell would find a way to offer her for ransom, after all. When she came to, she didn't know what had happened to her, who she was, or anything. Her memory was gone, she was like a child. They——"

"But the body in the lake—that was found? Did they murder some one else and—" Karesia interrupted.

"Now just you wait—I'll come to that," Colt interrupted in his turn. "Just let me finish with Mrs. Dascome first. . . . They kept her in that attic for over a year, Mrs. Kaime—all the time in deadly fear. Atwell put them up to a final bit of deviltry, then he left them to their fate—he made tracks for Canada, for as far away as he could get. By that time the defense had a dozen detectives searching for him and I was hot on his trail."

"Atwell told them to hurt—her face?" Karesia asked in horror.

"No, not that, Mrs. Kaime. They say it was an accident, and I believe them. Shortly after she came to, she had one of those attacks. Mrs. Culp wasn't by and she fell against the stove. She was unconscious again after that, she was delirious for weeks. They did their best for her, but they couldn't have a doctor, so it left a bad scar. You see, Mrs. Kaime, there is a type of criminal that won't commit murder or deliberately inflict torture. They'll steal, but not murder. Culp is that type, his wife too. Thail would strike down, if in anger, but he hasn't the nerve for a cold-blooded murder. No, between them all, they had fixed the crime on another man and they were anxious enough to have the thing quiet down, have Mrs. Dascome get well enough for them to take her a distance and lose her. But for all that year while J. D. was being tried, Thail had to stay on at Crisomby as Abe Best, the hired man, and the Culps had to appear just the quiet respectable farmers their neighbors thought them. Under Atwell's advice, they had gotten themselves into a horrible fix; they were in deadly fear all that year, but it was nothing to what they felt when J. D. was acquitted—they knew he'd run them down, if he could.

"Then they acted; they took Mrs. Das-

come in their flivver as far up New York State as they could get in a night. They gave her some money and some food and left her in a sparsely settled section. Culp was a Canadian from near Montreal, he'd known Mary Bliss, and it was Mrs. Culp who wrote in the book and gave it to her. They told her to walk to the first farmhouse and ask for work. Then Thail footed it to Buffalo, and the Culps went back to their farm at Crisomby, to live in fear. They hadn't murdered Elaine Dascome, that was all they could say for themselves."

"BUT you said there had been a murder?" Karesia interposed.

"There was. But now let me tell you J. D.'s and my side of it; the moment I heard of Mrs. Dascome's disappearance on the sixth of April and of J. D.'s being suspected, I suspected Atwell. I was south of Proctorville looking for Atwell when I read about it in the papers. Then I went back to Proctorville and there I found out for sure that Atwell was in Proctorville on the sixth of April, so he couldn't have done the thing himself. J. D. had been certain that Atwell had done it—that Elaine had gone out on the lake to meet Atwell; it was a blow to the defense. J. D. still clung to the belief that Atwell had a hand in it, and the defense had a dozen detectives at work on it, but they couldn't find a thing to offer as evidence.

"Now they gave me no orders, I was certain to be called as a witness, but I was so sure that Atwell was at the bottom of the crime that I started out on my own. I traced Atwell through Canada and down into California, and there I lost track of him—I've always thought that he went into Mexico. Then I was called back to give my testimony. . . . Now, Mrs. Kaime, J. D. came out of those trials with the same conviction I had, that his wife had been murdered on that sixth of April and that it was her body which was found in the lake. We were agreed, too, that Atwell was responsible—find Atwell, and the mystery would be solved.

"J. D. had others working for him, but he and I, we hunted together. We went to California and the first trace we got of Atwell was in San Francisco, in the Barbary Coast—a girl gave J. D. the hint, that Atwell had gone to Alaska. We went to

Alaska, only to find that Atwell had flown. We traced him back to San Francisco. Atwell had gone to Russia.

"Then we separated. I stayed in this country and J. D. went to Russia. What he went through there would fill a book, and Mrs. Kaime, he found that Atwell had ended his career there. He had been bayoneted to death in one of the raids the Reds made. J. D. got out of the country alive, which is one wonder. You'd have thought that J. D.'d have had enough, but not J. D. There was Meta Thail—we both thought that she knew something. We knew nothing about Thail, nothing about all this I have told you. J. D. had kept watch on her; for several years after the trials she had worked in a factory in New York. Then she had disappeared, and that looked queer. We searched this country for her—we were still searching when I caught a glimpse of that bent, scarred old woman scuttling into that garage on the street back of this. I kept watch for a day, a-purpose to scare her out. J. D. was on watch on the hillside—we wanted to see where she would go. She came to your house."

Karesia caught her breath. "You thought that she was Meta Thail!"

"Yes, *madam*. . . . But we couldn't prove it—then. She looked like Meta—Meta grew old fast after those trials, bent and thin and white-haired. She and Mrs. Dascome had always looked alike, alike enough for mother and daughter, both little and fair and big blue eyes. Now, Mrs. Kaime, when men are on a hunt like ours was, they don't stop at much. Well, J. D. came to your house then. You told him how you'd taken the woman in and that you meant to keep her. Then he rented your house of you—he wanted to keep watch on the woman, trace her to the people who had disfigured her in that way, made a frightened wreck of her—we felt pretty certain it had been done by those who thought that she knew too much.

"J. D. wanted to get into your house as soon as he could, so he took your own house away from you. I was nervous about your all being there under the same roof—it might be that whoever had done for Meta Thail, as we thought her, still had his eye on her and there might be a tragedy in your house. There hasn't been a day or night since Mary Bliss entered your house, that

J. D. hasn't had the house closely watched—mostly that harm shouldn't come to you.

"I GOT to work right away on that story of 'Mary Bliss,' and I found out exactly what was in the report J. D. gave you. It was up to us to trace that story, find out who had tacked the name onto Meta Thail, and why. I went to Canada—Mary Bliss had left Canada years before—no one knew where she was. I traced up the places where the woman with her name written in the little book had worked. I couldn't get anything. And J. D. waiting here for word!

"Then J. D. telegraphed me the discovery you had made, that Mary Bliss was Mrs. Dascome. I went straight to Crisomby. I couldn't get anything. Then—I'll never forget it—J. D.'s voice over long distance telling me of *your* inspiration!" Colt's small eyes shone; he brought his fist down on his knee again. "God! 'Bert!' he says. 'Culp couldn't have used his hay-rack *coming*, but he might have used it *going*! And, Bert, find if any young woman, small and slight, was buried in Crisomby graveyard about that time,' he says; and he added, like the lawyer he is and always will be: 'There may be something in it—it's worth looking into.' And then the man in him got uppermost. 'We'll owe it to Karesia!' he said."

"But it was John who calmly thought it out!" Karesia said proudly. Then the tears filled her eyes. "But why didn't he tell me?"

"You don't know John Dascome yet, madam, or you wouldn't ask that. Before John Dascome talks, he has to have *proof*."

"I know—he is so wise! . . . And his guess was right, Mr. Colt? That was where they got the body, so as to fix the murder on John, an innocent man! They were worse than murderers!" Karesia was aflame. Then she quieted. "Please go on, Mr. Colt."

"Well, I went to the Culps—they'd gone to California because he was in consumption. I saw that attic and in a crack I found a little gold pin that was Elaine Dascome's. . . . I found out that shortly before that sixth of April, a young married woman, a frail little thing, had died in Crisomby and had been buried behind Crisomby church. It's a lonely enough spot,

and the Crisomby people go to bed early. The grave was empty—it's a thing Crisomby will talk of for many a day, that empty grave and the bones that belonged there buried in Proctorville under a headstone that for six years has borne the name of Elaine Dascome! . . .

"You see, Mrs. Kaime, Atwell had a double purpose in advising those two, Thail and Culp, to do that thing. J. D. was suspected of murder, but if no body was produced he would probably go free, and Atwell wanted him finished. Atwell also wanted Elaine Dascome kept alive, for, by producing her later on, he might make some money. He persuaded those two that it was the only way in which they could save their own skins—and perhaps make a fortune. They dressed that corpse in Elaine Dascome's clothes and put it in the lower lake where it would surely be found—Thail and Culp. But Atwell was forced to decamp, and J. D. and I kept him moving, and those two, those three, the Culps and Thail, hadn't the brains nor the courage to carry out Atwell's plan. They turned Elaine Dascome loose—after what had happened to her face and her brain, who would ever find her? Besides, Elaine Dascome had been buried in Proctorville. They could have murdered her to get her out of the way, but I repeat what I said, they're not that type of criminal, Culp in particular. And I don't believe they disfigured her.

"Now here's an interesting bit; Jimmy Calhoun can't account for his lapse of memory, he probably won't ever be able to, but he did us a service—he remembered that about a month before I came to Crisomby, a man had come to Crisomby asking for a man called Orlaf Thail. He said that Mrs. Culp was Thail's sister. His description of Thail tallied with Jimmy Calhoun's remembrance of Abe Best, the Culps' hired man. I was in need of that information—it linked the three together, the Culps, Thail, and Meta. I took the fastest train out here.

"Meantime, J. D. was in the hands of the authorities here—he had stated his case, had got their permission to take to the hospital the woman he said was his wife. Then I got here with what information I had. In a way, we joined forces with the authorities here, for they were looking for a man whose description fitted Orlaf Thail.

Their man had had a quarrel with an old woman who was living with him and had struck her down, then had cleared. She died of the blow and he was wanted for murder.

"I'VE been here two days, Mrs. Kaime. I began my search for the Culps. Now, J. D.'s been in danger these ten days; he was on probation, as it were. He had to prove his case. It seems like life was meant to be hard for him. Up to nine o'clock to-night, we couldn't *prove* anything; nothing was certain and Mrs. Dascome, when she came to after the operation to-day, said things that might put J. D. and me in a wrong light. It was a bitter disappointment to him—the man was sick over it, she had failed him. . . .

"But I had found the Culps. I found what was left of them, this evening, in a miserable shack way out in South Los Angeles. They deserve what's come to them—he's coughing his life away, and she's bed-ridden from an injury. A Los Angeles automobile driven by a man with too much bootleg in him did a more sensible bit of work than they usually do; it ran over her about a year ago. She signed a receipt for a sum paid her for damages, that's how I traced Millie Culp. . . . She and he signed a confession made to me—such is life!

"I took it to J. D. first thing. I was worried about him—there's not a man in millions could have borne up under the strain of these last few days, on top of all he's been through. But he took it so damned quietly, that confession. It's the end of a long trail, and he's tired. Then he says, steady and deep: 'Go and tell it all to her, Bert—I'll take care of this. Tell her, too, that they have found Thail. The woman he murdered was Meta, his wife. I suppose, when she disappeared, she came to him and the time came when he wanted to be rid of her. She may have threatened him with what she knew—it's likely. . . . Tell Mrs. Kaime not to worry about me. Tell her to sleep well to-night; there are those who are very grateful to her.' "

Colt rose; there was genuine emotion in his awkward bow. "I've told it the best way I know how, Mrs. Kaime—and I'm one of the grateful ones too."

He was moving to the door, then his eyes fell on the long parcel he had brought.

"Gee! I forgot!" he said, and looked thoroughly uncomfortable. He pointed.

"Those are your paintings, Mrs. Kaime."

"My kakemonos!"

"Yes, madam. . . . I could tell you some other story, but I'm telling the truth to-night, so I'll confess to it—that I stole them."

Karesia looked her amazement.

"Why—you see, when J. D. first took your house, we hadn't but one idea—to find out for sure that Mary Bliss was Meta Thail. It was arranged between J. D. and me, that I should get in here that first night and take them. You might go to the police, but we calculated that you'd tell J. D. about it, and then he would recommend me to you. Then I'd have a chance to look at close and question Mary Bliss."

HERBERT COLT had said that it would make "a big stir." It did. On the second morning after his visit to Karesia, every paper had the whole story. "Nothing said about the torment of those seven years," Karesia thought a little bitterly.

She was sorry to see her name in the account, but glad that the matter had been handled so skilfully; she suspected that Dascome had saved her as much as possible. She learned how tenderly she had cared for the poor terror-haunted waif who had come to her door. "Stranger than fiction!" said the papers. "But life is stranger than fiction."

Karesia read this account at daybreak and braced herself for a probable invasion of reporters. But the first person to burst in upon her was Rossiter. "I've just read about it, Kara!" he said when she came down. "Good God! Think of that seven years!"

Karesia permitted herself the reproof, "You have your reward for being determined to think evil."

"There are plenty in the same boat with me—I don't know when I've had such a shock." He was greatly disturbed; he strode about aimlessly.

"I'm fearfully sorry for it all, Kara. I want to tell him so."

"I hope you will, Rand."

"And you know, Kara—Clarice——"

"I do know," she said. "Be happy, Rand, you deserve it."

IT WAS the middle of May. The Dascome family had made definite plans for the future. For precaution's sake, the doctors had advised the long stay at the hospital, though now Elaine was able to be about her room and take a daily drive.

From Clarice and from Rossiter, Karesia had heard of Elaine's recovery. Little by little, Elaine had learned all that past history. They had kept the fact of her disfigurement from her as long as possible, but even that she had borne with surprising calm; she had shown a childlike faith in Clarice's assurance that, when she was quite well, they would make her face over.

Elaine Dascome seemed to have returned to life with no very clear understanding of the past and with vague ideas as to the future. As a child, she had been very gentle and submissive, entirely bid-dable, until the tiny spot of irritation in her brain had aroused her to an irrational activity. It had given to her the exotic charm which had captured Dascome, and the wild irritability of her worst moments which had worked havoc in their lives. Now, she seemed to feel nothing acutely; she was simply a child of very moderate intelligence grown a little older; a clinging, affectionate child-woman, very pathetic in her complete trust and obedience; very like Mary Bliss deprived of haunting fear and with a somewhat vague memory restored. She seemed to regard Dascome much as, when she was a child, she had regarded her father—he would care for her always. The most pronounced thing about her was her delight in Clarice; she would listen by the hour to Clarice's tales of the studio. "When my face is well, I'll come and see you act," she told Clarice. Occasionally she had flashes of intelligence. Once she said to Dascome, "I'm only a little over forty, John, but in my body I feel the way I look. Even if my face is made to look better, I shall feel like an old woman, not as when you married me. I am so sorry."

Clarice came to see Karesia often. From the freedom of her confidences, it was evident that she had no suspicion of Karesia's heartache. Clarice had begun to realize. "It is hard for father," she told Karesia sadly. "He is so gentle and kind to mother, but I can tell his love died long ago—I mean the way a man loves a woman. He's sick with pity for her—all day long."

He looks so ill. He's getting gray. I can see that everything's an effort to him—just his will keeps him going. . . . I wonder sometimes, too, whether there isn't some one whom he loves and this has ended it all."

Rossiter spoke his mind very positively. "I tell you, Kara, it's too much for him. I'm sorry for her, but there is such a thing as common sense! She doesn't really need him—not the sacrifice he is making. If she freed him, let him marry you, she wouldn't miss him—so long as she had affectionate care. He's about the finest man I've ever known!"

"I wouldn't have it!" Karesia exclaimed. "And he would never do it. Never! It would be forsaking his helpless wife!"

Karesia had grown pitifully white and agitated; Rossiter was afraid to tell her how alarmed he was about Dascome. He told her: "I've talked business with Dascome a good deal lately. He's willing Clarice should sign up with us. He advises her putting some of her money into our concern. I have been holding off with our big picture until she can give her time to it."

It was a relief to Karesia that Dascome could "talk business." Evidently Rossiter saw much of Clarice. They had not told her so, but she decided that they were engaged. Dascome would see to it that Clarice would be valuable to Rossiter, not a wife to be lightly regarded; in reality, Rand-some Rossiter's partner—a working partner.

Karesia herself could do no work; she had the numb feeling that she was waiting for an upheaval of some sort, some desperate distress that would drive her to her typewriter because it would be the only thing left in life. All these weeks and she had not heard Dascome's voice once—and he had not written to her! She understood: he was afraid he would go under, break. He had said: "It's beyond me. . . . You'll understand—and forgive me?"

But it was Rossiter who crystallized her fears at last; told her she must send for Dascome to save his reason. And, at his instance, she did. She wrote: "John, we promised each other. I need you. Come to me."

KARESIA did not know, that night, when it was that she passed from anxiety into sleep. She slept heavily and dreamed an intangible dream, a vague

vision of the hillside. There was only a part of the dream that had any substance: she was climbing upward and upward with Mary Bliss's hand in hers, helping her along. The hillside was dotted with spikes of yucca bloom—they looked like tall candles. She told Mary Bliss, "They are the candles of God." She told her not to be afraid, and Mary Bliss said, "I'm not afraid now—it's pretty up here." Then something light and warm, like soft fingers, trailed over her face, waked Karesia; she was wide awake. It was morning, the first faint hint of day. It had been a mild night and the window beside her bed was open: a light breeze was blowing in her face.

She knew that she could not sleep any more. She looked at her watch; it was four o'clock and in the east a thread of vermilion marked the meeting of earth and sky. . . . Karesia bathed and dressed.

Then she went downstairs and opened the front door wide. She wanted to fill her big room with sunshine. It was much too early for Dascome to come, only five o'clock. She went upstairs again and opened all the windows to the coming sunshine; her house must breathe cheer; Dascome had told her so often that she always brought him cheer. If he came to her ill and broken, there must be no chilly corners in her house.

Then she came down into the big room; the front door was closed and Dascome stood in the center of the room. He said nothing, simply stood motionless, looking at her, and Karesia uttered a cry and ran to him—they had not told her that he looked like *this*, eyes hollow, cheeks thin and lined, like carved stone, streaks of gray in his fair hair.

Her hands touched him. "John! . . . Dearest! . . . Oh, why didn't you come to me before! You got my note?"

"No," he said in a voice utterly without modulation; his hands did not lift, it was like a stone image speaking. Then, suddenly, the stone face broke like smashed granite that emitted a cry, and, between her outstretched hands, his body crumpled and sank, his only remaining strength in the hands that clung to her skirts, clutched, then clung to her, then held her in a convulsed grip like that of the drowning.

Karesia could not move; she tried to bend to him, her breath lost in terror.

When she did speak, he could not hear her; he had begun to sob aloud, his cries smothered against her body, his face pressed to her, his arms about her like a vise. . . . He shook and shivered and sobbed like a frantic child clinging to its mother for protection; only they were the deep, tearing sobs of a man, agonizing, rending. His hot tears soaked through Karesia's dress, burning her. He sobbed and sobbed—it seemed endless, a wild convulsion of nature.

It is a terrible thing to see a strong man break, broad shoulders rounded and bent, flesh aquiver, all self-control gone. Men were not meant to weep—it tears them asunder; it is an agony of body and soul. And when it is one whom we love far, far better than aught else in life!

"It's been—more than—I could bear. . . . It's been—more—than—I—could bear!"

It was a relief to hear him speak, feel his hold loosen and his sobs lessen; she had thought that he was going mad. "Yes, dear—yes, I know. And you came to me—to Karesia——"

She reached and drew up a chair, unclasped his arms from about her knees and sat down, let his arms circle her neck, and held his head pressed to her breast. She could kiss him now, and smooth his hair. "Yes, dear—yes, John, dear—I know, dear."

He wept out his story against her breast, like an agonized boy to his mother. "I lied—to—her. . . . Last night—she—asked me . . . if—in these years—there was—some one—I loved. She—had been—worrying. I lied—I denied—you. . . . But it made her—happy. . . . I sat by her bed and—we talked—about Clarice—and Rossiter. She was happy. . . . The scarred side—her poor face—was—against the—pillow. She smiled when I kissed her—good night. She looked like Elaine. . . . I walked about till—nearly—morning. . . . The nurse watched her sleep—like a child—till just before—four o'clock she heard her sigh. . . . Then—it was all over . . . in a few minutes—she was gone. . . . A blood-vessel—ruptured—in the brain. They called Clarice—and me—but she had—gone. She didn't suffer—she never knew. She was asleep. . . . She never had a fair chance. . . . Life has been *cruel* to her—*cruel*!"

Karesia could not speak because of awe.

At four o'clock! Her dream: "I am not afraid now—it's pretty up here!" And the soft fingers trailed across her face.

"DON'T cry, dear—don't cry," she whispered. "We live again—I believe it! Her gentleness and sweetness will live on—in a stronger body. Elaine has not ended—she has begun. . . . Don't cry any more, dear. . . . You are very tired, that's all—very, very tired."

"I had to come to you, Karesia. . . . I was dying—I had only strength enough to get here. . . . Rossiter is with Clarice." He was too spent to talk, head heavy and body growing lax.

Karesia's heart contracted with fear; he was so utterly done. "Of course you came to me. You promised to come to me, 'I shall come to you as straight as a child goes to its mother.' Don't you remember our promise to each other? . . . You must come and lie down now and I'll sit by you—close by you, here on the couch—in our room——"

Karesia urged him and he tried to get up from his knees. She had to help, and he staggered and leaned on her like one drunk, eyes half closed, nerveless. He sank on the couch like a log, his eyes closed. "I couldn't sleep . . . these last weeks—and I wouldn't take—a drug," he said with infinite dullness. "I walked—all night——"

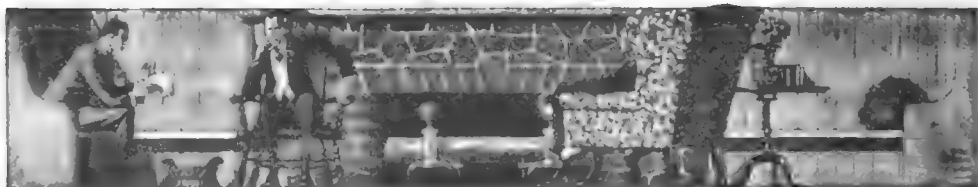
He was asleep before she finished tending him, unconscious that she removed his shoes and unbuttoned his collar, bathed his face and covered him, listening first to his shaken, uneven breathing, then to the steady, regularly drawn breath of blessed sleep. He needed no physician; he needed rest—and her presence, sensed even in sleep; she sat on the floor with her head on his pillow, and he turned his cheek to hers.

Hours afterward, when Dascome waked, she was beside him. She had done many things in the meantime; Rossiter had brought Clarice to her; Rossiter was doing the things Dascome was unable to do; hers was no longer a double house, it was all one. But she had watched for the waking; when he opened his eyes it was her face he saw.

"Karesia?" It was his own voice again, steady and deep.

"Yes, dear."

THE END



Everybody's Chimney Corner

*Where Reader, Author and Editor
Gather to Talk Things Over*

EVERYBODY'S is proud of the new authors it has introduced these last few months—Arlen, Carson, Calloway, Louise Saunders and the rest. And next month it will introduce another of whom it expects great things—Beale Davis, whose first novel, beginning in April, is called "One-Way Street." Davis was born in Petersburg, Virginia, and chose law for a career. Then he switched to diplomacy. Let him tell the reason:

Clients who paid were slow in coming, and my first case was one to which I was appointed by the court—to defend a colored "boy" charged with murder and with no money to employ counsel. George convinced me that at the time the crime was committed he was at the other end of the town in a friend's house.

Confident that I would secure an acquittal for my client, I went into court so full of the law of alibi that I had little room for any of the rest of the criminal code. Then I got my shock. George, the night before the trial was to begin, had seen fit to write out and sign a detailed confession. There I was—knowing all the law in the world which even touched on alibis and with only the vaguest, classroom recollection of confessions—when, how, and where admissible as evidence. What I said in my maiden speech to the jury I've no idea, but somehow I stumbled and stammered through.

AT THAT time one of Petersburg's real characters was the sheriff, and according to the story which he was not slow to tell, the following conversation took place between him and my client on the way from the courtroom to the jail outside:

"Well, George, what do you think of your chances?"

George shuffled along for a minute and then answered: "I'll tell you how 'tis, sheriff. When I went in de cou'thouse dis mornin' I was trustin' to my lawyer, but now I ain't trustin' nobody but Gawd."

In 1914 I received my first appointment in the diplomatic service—secretary of Legation at Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I remained in Haiti for about a year and a half, during which time there were no less than four presidents of the Republic, one of

whom I was unfortunate enough to see murdered, cut into bits and carried through the street in sections by a blood-crazy mob of revolutionists.

From Haiti I was transferred to London as second secretary of our Embassy there, and had the privilege of serving under the greatest of our Ambassadors to the Court of St. James's, Walter Hines Page. While in London I was in charge of the passport department and learned more about people than I ever will again in the same space of time.

After London came Denmark, and from Copenhagen I was transferred to Madrid, my last post before resigning from the Service. It was during these years, 1915 to 1921, that I got my background and types for "One-Way Street," which you are publishing.

ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE ("Nastasia," page 37) wrote a story at fourteen called "How I Kissed the Blarney Stone" and a few years later was editor of a high-school paper with Jack London working for him. It was natural that he should go into newspaper work and land in New York.

My first newspaper assignment [he writes] was to discover why a young man in Berkeley, California, who always had been tied to his mother's apron strings, had eloped with the cook; my last was to see something of the Great War in Belgium and the aftermath of war in London. In between—and it was a span of eighteen years—such circumstances as the Madero revolution in Mexico, going to Labrador to meet Peary, a ringside seat in Reno, the burning of San Francisco, and Tokyo in the grip of a mob.

Some curious perversity tucked under the outer folds of my to all appearances normal brain dictates that after so many years in the crash and grind of the news—subway accidents in Manhattan and a gas barrage at Audenarde—emancipation turns my inclinations to the opposite pole. I would rather be camping at Tinajas Altas, the only water-hole in ninety miles of the Desert of Altar, than sitting in the Horseshoe at the Metropolitan—though I never sat there. I have found more fun at a picture show in the capital of Baja California—where the last reel leaves the heroine up to her neck in the death tank and no more reels until the next gasolina from Guaymas, due in a month—more



BEALE DAVIS, whose first novel, "One-Way Street," begins in April. He chose the diplomatic service as a way of knowing people, getting a background for writing, and he was right. During the war he was in charge of the United States passport bureau in London. "Why do so many people mistake a passport office for a confessional?" he asks.

fun there, I say, than in Lucas' restaurant near the Madeleine.

I would rather see—and write about—a sand-storm in that place called "The Little Hell" hard by Sonoita on the Line, than see and write about the coronation of a king in Westminster. I would rather watch the play of colors on spikes of *ocotilla* down in the desert of Fresno than the magic lights of Broadway. It's more worth while.

THAT delightful story "Candle Lighter" (page 85) was written by Miss Norma Patterson, a young woman who says she has no history, "past, present or pluperfect."

I am a *feme sole* [she writes] of just the right age, with just the proper lack of means to keep me prodding editors with stories, and just enough wits (and not a wit more) to put one over here and there. Now I happen to know that EVERYBODY'S rather prides itself on gathering to its pages writers whose lives ring the bizarre note . . . the hazardous, the adventurous. Not that they would hunt out a man who has shot a bear and invite him to write a story, but following the assumption that an interesting life makes an interesting writer, or—we'll put it this way—makes a writer *more* interesting. So that a single copy of the magazine sometimes hails from Alaska to India by way of the Argentine. Among this ocean-climbing, star-dragging, shark-elbowing assemblage I take a meek and wistful seat.

But I should like to say this to you, Mr. Editor, and all the traveled rest of ye: *in a story* I can go as far as the next! (For evidence see "Candle Lighter" up front some place.) It takes boats and trains and air-wagons to get you going, but for me—just a splashy bottle of ink.

After all, the world is divided into two hemispheres, the rovers and the Candle Lighters who sit at home and keep their wicks trimmed against the day when the rover shall tire of his roving. If all the world went adventuring, who would hold down those honored institutions, the hearthstones? Taken by and large, is there anything more chancy (under the circumstances) than to keep a wick trimmed? I'd like a man's opinion of this.

THOMSON BURTIS, author of "Atlas" (page 121), is now twenty-six years old. Since fifteen he has been on his own by choice and most of that time has been spent rambling. For four years he was an army flyer.

My most hilarious experience as a flyer [he writes] was during the Mingo mining war in West Virginia. My observer and I were forced to land in a Martin bomber with fifteen hundred pounds of bombs aboard on the outskirts of the territory under martial law. The natives thought martial law had been extended and that we had landed on purpose. Within a half hour they had asked our permission to continue with the fair they were having, and we gave permission. For safety's sake we did not deny their assumption, and for thirteen days

ruled with an iron hand until the rain let up and we got out.

The most depressing experience that I have had was the storm patrol on the Gulf of Mexico, when Corpus Christi was wiped out by a tidal wave that killed four or five hundred people. Flying over the Gulf spotting survivors, with sharks nibbling on the floating bodies of the dead, and then returning to a town that was a stinking shambles and people who had, without exception, lost either a relative or all their property, was far from pleasant.

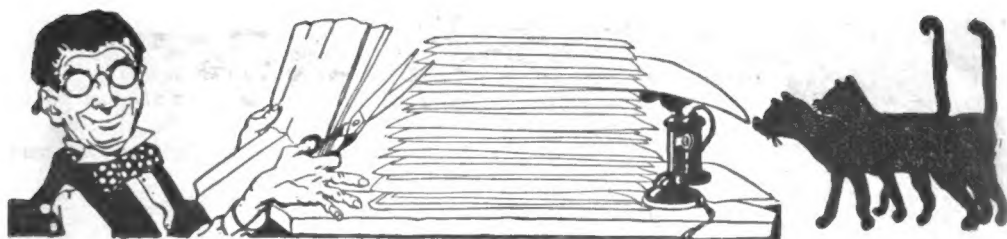
I expect to continue rambling about, poking an inquisitive nose into various places, and trying to sell enough stories to pay my fare to the next town. It is a literal fact that when I open my trunk I am at home, and when I unfold my typewriter I am in my office. The discerning reader will readily realize by the above that I am unmarried, too lazy to go to work, and perfectly contented.

FRANK HELLER contributes the first of "Mr. Collin's Adventures" (page 72), a series of stories with a new and unique central character in an international swindler of singular cunning and most noble heart who has just been warmly received by the wide circle of readers of the author's recently published novel, "The Emperor's Old Clothes." Of his beginning at writing we will let Mr. Heller himself tell:

Behind the palm trees the sea was rolled out like a big blue coronation carpet. The sun shone. On a bench that hardly gave protection from the fiery October sun a gentleman was reflectively rolling a coin in his pocket. That gentleman was I. The palm tree grew in Monte Carlo; I had come to break the bank, and the coin in my pocket, worth twenty francs, was the last thing I had in this world.

That is how I started writing. When you have cut most of the cables connecting you with the land of Charles XII; when you have lost everything except a twenty-franc piece, and haven't got anything to do in this world, time is apt to become long. So I found. One day I found a way of whiling away both time and, which was even more important, appetite. I got an idea that struck me as suitable for a series of short stories. I started writing that series. In the next year my collar number went down from 42 to 37. My neck looked like a pale weed in a too big flower pot; and I chiefly subsisted thanks to the kind aborigines; but at last I had my book ready. I sent it to a publisher in Sweden. The cost of transport was such that I trembled at the thought of a very probable return; that would mean a fortune of another three francs in expenses.

But the god of fair beginnings did really prosper my hand. No other three francs were needed. The book was accepted. It appeared, it made a hit, and it was translated into several languages. Its name was "Mr. Collin's Adventures." And from the day of its publication to now neither world wars nor revolutions have stopped my moving finger. It has written inexorably. Whether half of its lines ought to be canceled, I would not say; anyhow, very few of them are likely to be washed out by tears.



Prose and Worse, by Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

On Brooklyn, N. Y., *Eagle* calendar: "There is nothing like the *Eagle* for a vacation companion." (W. B. H.)
 In Brooklyn: "Atlantic Electric Sign Co., A. Tricker, Representative." (W. B. H.)
 From a school composition: "He rung his friend's hand merrily." (MISS E. T.)
 Orator at Brooks, Iowa, home-coming picnic: "B. Y. Gosh." (There's the patron saint of rural profanity for you.)
 Professors in Psychology Department, University of Chicago: "Messrs Berry, Kingsbury and Maberry." (Prof. Logan teaches Pol. Econ.)
 In Chicago restaurant: "Help not allowed to handle butter with fingers."
 In Greengburg, Ind.: "Meek Ice & Coal Co." (W-H-A-T!!)
 In Syracuse Herald: "For Sale, young family, also Guernsey heifer calf. Inquire Franck Morrow." (L. L. B.)
 Los Angeles marriage licenses: "Charles J. Damm, Mildred H. Andrews. Leslie Nettenstrom, Anna Cuss."

(La Salle Post)

The beds are strong, large, and of the heavy tubular brass variety, with the best of clean, well aired covers; the dresser in each room is of golden oak with large mirrors facing the guest.

They just chase you round the room.

(Elmhurst Press)

NOTICE.

If some people would mind their own business instead of other people's it would be better. Who those shoes fit may put them on.—JOHN KECK.

I think you'd better show me a larger size, in all calf.

(Evanston Press)

"Three Dogs Attack Man in North End."

Not the usual way of getting over a fence.

(Hornell, N. Y., Tribune)

Buffalo physicians say that the operation by which skin was grafted and the scalp sewn in place on Mrs. Mary Di Marti of Buffalo was successful. Mrs. Di Marti was scalped at a canning factory at Model City and it was two hours before the missing scalp could be found.

Don't you just love canned scal-ups?

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1924

(Evanston, Ill.)

Hitchcock is manager of the Evanston branch of the Western Union Telegraph company. He admitted to Inspector Angier by mail that he "does not drink, gamble, or use tobacco," that he is a "good dresser," that he has a "lovable and affectionate nature," that his blood is "blue," that he is the "loneliest man you can imagine," that he is in dire need of a chum and companion as well as a house-keeper, that he cares only for ladies, and if they are willing to serve in those capacities "they must just make up their minds to be loved and petted to death."

The line forms on the right, there; don't crowd!

(McKinley, Pa., Times-Chronicle)

Edw. J. Richardson is improving and with care will in a few days be able to leave his bed, after a three-weeks' siege of confinement. (A. H. J.)

Ed, my sympathies are yours in conglomerate masses.

"Ninety three million miles away, far from the most remote rural delivery route, it manages to keep itself so constantly before the public that every man, woman and child knows the sun by its first name and absolutely refuses to accept any substitute."

There's always some one ready to make light of everything.

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(Chicago Tribune)

"Omaha, Neb.—Fire this evening destroyed the plant of the Omaha Auto Body Company with all contents. Elliott B. Smoak, owner, said the loss was \$150,000."

Where there's smoke, etc.

(Dixon News)

"Shot In Melon Patch; Files Suit."

A patched suit covers many an honest heart.

(Aberdeen, S. D., News)

Many women attended the sale and purchased a stock of clothing for next to nothing.

These envelopes are the very newest thing in stationery.

(Horicon, N. Y.)

Mr. and Mrs. Forest welcomed a baby girl to their home on the 15th inst. Dr. Howard Swan, of Chestertown, is attending them.

One of Old Doc Stork's competitors?

(Hamilton, Ill., Press)

Next Thursday has been set aside as a day for emphasizing the loss that happens through carelessness and unpreparedness. Governor Lowden has proclaimed it as a day of special observance. And you, beloved, might help out in the cause by seeing that the flues of your property are clean and in good repair; that the medicines are out of the reach of the baby, if you have one, and if you haven't it would be a good time to arrange to supply the deficiency, for the worse lack to the state is a lack of babies.

Did you ever know it to snow harder than it did last night?

(Kankakee, Ill., Republican)

The public is invited to call at the *Republican* office and see one of the best equipped pants in the state. We will be glad to show you.

Hip pockets?

(Dayton, Ohio, Journal)

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Thal (Pearl Office), of Far Hills Avenue, welcomed a boy, on the Fourth. The baby is the youngest of three boys.

A most singular case.

(Lime Light, Tex.)

The young couple will make their future home on a farm near Logan, Okla. It looks very much to the Lime Light aggregation that this young couple will have just oodles of time to feed chickens, water pigs and watch their crops grow, as the "kids" have gotten off by themselves so as not to be bothered with pa and ma.

No, I never liked the old man, either.

(Overheard on a Chicago bus)

"You know the two Shedd girls who married the Barnes boys?"

As Antonio whispered to Shylock: "Aye, and chips of the old block, too."

(New York Herald)

Stainer's Cantata, "The Daughter of Jarirus," will be sung by the choir of Verona Presbyterian Church in the church Sunday night.

Suckers and eels are running in Peekman River.

Overheard the rehearsals, probably.

(Mt. Tabor, Ohio, Items)

Okey Johns is repairing the Mrs. Toms house and will move his family into it before he goes to the hospital for treatment.

Not as Okey as he seems.

(Crum's Ridge, Ohio, Items)

Lizzie and Cora Curtis spent Sunday afternoon at H C Leasure's.

It is natural for us to complain, but does it get us anywhere? No! Let us quit it.

If a man can go 20 years without a bath and keep well why bathe so much? Huh.

Sweet taters and young chickens is on the menu here. Oh my its great.

What kind of history are we making each day, would you like to see it in print. Wouldn't it look awful, huh.

C W Mallett purchased him a new Chevrolet car the 10th.

If we can't say any good of a person let's keep our lips closed. What do you think.

"Thrice armed is he who gets his 'knock' in first."

(Caldwell, Ohio, Press)

LOST:—Thursday afternoon, between Caldwell and Marietta, a black Leather grip containing valuable papers and the usual clothes carried by a traveling man. A. Dallager, Zanesville, Ohio.

Like the old-maid delegate who attended a convention, taking with her a clean shirtwaist and a two-dollar bill, and came home without having changed either.

(Boston Post)

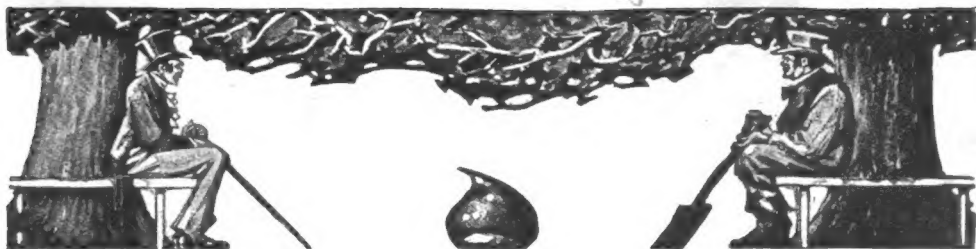
The crowd was better than was expected, there being about 100 present, 300 of whom were vets, guests of the ball clubs at the game.

Make the men sit down.

(Haverhill, Mass., Gazette)

FOR SALE—Bressnahan Baby Splitter. Apply L. Martin & Co., rear 108 Merrimack St., City.

Wish I'd had this before I moved, and I wouldn't.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

JOAB: I've got a new pig and named it Ink.

JOE: What's the idea. Is he black?

JOAB: No, but he is always getting out of the pen and running all over.

JAMES, aged five, was eating Sunday dinner at his aunt's house.

The first course was turkey soup with spaghetti in it. The aunt noticed James's reluctance to touch his soup.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked. "Don't you like turkey soup?"

"Oh, yes," answered the boy, "I like it when mother makes it. She doesn't put the windpipes in like you do."

"**PHYSICAL** culture is awfully interesting!" cried the eager girl who had just come back from boarding-school for a vacation. "Look, papa. To develop the arms I grasp this rod in this way and then move it slowly from right to left. See?"

"Wonderful!" replied her father in admiration. "What extraordinary things teachers have discovered! If you had a bundle of straw at the end of that rod you'd be sweeping."

A PARTY of tourists was about to be steered through the ruins of Pompeii. The guide began his lecture by saying:

"Pompeii was destroyed by eruption in 79."

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady from the Middle West. "Just eight years after the Chicago fire!"

"**ISN'T** a law-suit involving a patent right about the dullest thing imaginable?" asked one lawyer of another.

"Not always," was the reply. "I attended a trial of that character not long ago that was really funny. A tall lawyer named Short was reading a six-thousand-word document he called a brief!"

MR. LAY-TOWERS came home the other night even later than usual. He got into the hall all right but stumbled on the first stair, and his wife came to the top of the stairs with her torch, which she flashed upon him.

"Is that you, Henry?" she asked curtly.

He drew himself together with all the dignity he could summon.

"And who else might you be expecting at two o'clock in the morning?"

LITTLE EDWARD, aged three, is much afraid of thunder and lightning. One night during a severe electrical storm his mother tried to comfort him by telling him the need of rain and that he must not be afraid, for it was all the Lord's work.

Just as she finished there came a violent clap of thunder. Very innocently he asked, "Well, Mama, when is the Lord going to quit work?"

"**DO YOU** do much reading these long winter evenings?" asked the interested old lady of her colored yardman.

"No, mam," was the reply, "dese evenin's am plenty long enough as it is."

MATT TOLLIVER is an assistant fireman for a college in Dixie. His mountain origin betrays itself in many a quaint accent and idiom. Bill Street and Daly Morgan are "help" in the same institution. Although both of the latter are illiterate, their flatwoods rearing gives them a feeling of superiority.

"Bill, Matt's an awful ignor'nt feller, ain't he?" Daly remarked to his friend Street one day. "D'ye ever notice the way he talks? Like fer instance he meets the *President*, he'll say, 'Howdy, Fesser!' He don't never say *Per-fesser* at all!"

THE tall, proud girl turned haughtily to the white-robed figure.

"Have you no heart?" she asked in a low tone.

"No," he growled.

"Well, give me ten cents' worth of liver."

DR. CRABBE had almost succeeded in dismissing Mrs. Gassoway, when she stopped in the doorway, exclaiming, "Why, doctor, you didn't look to see if my tongue was coated!"

"I know it isn't," said the doctor wearily. "You never find grass on a racetrack."

DOWN in Texas the short cotton crop forced a large number of country negroes to the cities. One of them applied for a job at a large employment agency.

"There's a job at the Eagle Laundry," said the man behind the desk. "Want it?"

The applicant shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Tell you how 'tis, boss," he said finally. "Ah sure does want a job mighty bad, but de fac' is, I ain't never washed a eagle."

THE English girl was endeavoring to become a saleswoman in a New York department store, her specialty being boys' clothing. She heard the buyer say to a customer:

"Yes, we have wonderful values in rompers, and the youngsters fairly live in rompers now."

Shortly afterward she heard the buyer say on the telephone: "Well, you know I live in Yonkers now."

She went to one of the saleswomen and said: "Now I know what rompers are, but what in the wide world are yonkers?"

WHITTIER, California, was settled by Quakers, and there are still a good many of that denomination left. The usual other churches are not lacking, however, and one of these claims the following incident:

Sunday school had been in progress half an hour when a wiry small boy came in dragging behind him a slightly larger girl, red-faced and expostulating.

"Why, Gordon!" asked his teacher, hurrying toward them. "Doesn't the little girl want to come?"

"No, ma'am, she'd rather go to her own Sunday school; but you said each one of us was to bring a Friend today and this was the only one I could get."

NEWSBOY: Great mystery! Fifty victims!

PASSER-BY: Here, boy, I'll take one. (After reading a moment.) Say, boy, there's nothing of the kind in this paper. Where is it?

NEWSBOY: That's the mystery, gov'nor. You're the fifty-first victim.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD Doris was getting ready for bed. Suddenly she turned to her mother and asked:

"Mother, are we going to move tomorrow?"

"Yes, dear, this is the last night you will sleep here," she was told.

"Then," said wee Doris, kneeling beside her bed, "I'd better say good-by to God now if we move to Boston in the morning."

A YOUNG man just back from college was dispensing his newly acquired wisdom to a crowd of his townsmen, most of whom were older than himself.

"We all have to begin at the bottom and go up," he observed sagely.

"Yes," agreed Bob Markham, a droll, illiterate fellow, standing at the outer edge of the crowd. "We begin at the bottom of everything 'cept one."

"What's that, Bob?" demanded the collegian.

"Diggin' a well."

"**HOW** are you feeling, ol' man?" inquired the ward doctor of one of his patients.

"Not so bad, doctor," replied the patient, "but my breathing troubles me."

"Well," assured the doctor, "I'll see if I can stop that tomorrow."